

AS THEY WAIT: UNDOCUMENTED ECUADORIANS IN NEW YORK CITY

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Nicolas Eilbaum

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Nicolas Eilbaum, Ph.D.

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My dissertation explores the tension between temporary and permanent migration. While many migrants leave for the United States intending to work for a short time, many end up staying much longer than originally planned. Why does temporary migration seem so often to become permanent? The answer I explore is based on the concept of embeddedness, or lack thereof, as developed in economic sociology. The decision to leave is made in dense social spaces. Once emigrants have left, however, social density drops. The emigrant conditions—the effects of distance, the new kinds of jobs, the lack of papers—contribute to making decision-making elusive, and return is continually put off. The concept of waiting is discussed to capture the migrants’ “non-decision” to stay as time goes by.

The material I present concentrates on two Ecuadorian families of urban and relatively middle-class background, now undocumented in Queens (NYC). While participant observation was employed to build relationships and extended conversations with the emigrants, most of the material is socio-biographical, as I reconstruct the social world they come from in Ecuador, and discuss how this background helps us understand their emigrant trajectories. The combination of participant observation and socio-biographical methodology aims at drawing the links between life in the sending and receiving country, moving back and forth between the migrants’ present and their past. One of the goals of the dissertation is to let migrants

speaking for themselves as much as possible—extensive transcriptions from interviews seek to convey some of the original texture of immigrant life.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nicolás Eilbaum was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he attended elementary school, high school, and college at the University of Buenos Aires, taking his degree in Sociology and Economics. After working for several years for the National Direction of Fiscal Coordination with the Provinces at the Treasury Department, he left Argentina in 2003 to pursue graduate studies in Sociology at Cornell University.

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INTRODUCTION:

SOUTH AMERICAN CROSSROADS IN ECUADORIAN QUEENS

The sociology of emigration and immigration is inseparable from the reflexive attitude that consists in investigating, in connection with every aspect that is being studied, the social conditions that made it possible to study it, or in other words the constitution of the object under consideration as an object of study and the effects this has on the aspect of the study that is being made.

Abdelmalek Sayad 2004: 2

I. American Visas

On February 24, 2005, Deportivo Cuenca (Ecuador) played C.F. Pachuca (Mexico) at the Stadium Miguel Hidalgo in Pachuca, Mexico, for the group stage of the 2005 *Copa Libertadores*, the premier club competition in South American soccer. About 80 Cuenca fans had signed up to travel and support their team, and the club helped them get discount air tickets and arrange the necessary paperwork. The game was tight but ended with the Mexicans defeating the Ecuadorians 2-1. As Cuenca's newspaper *El Mercurio* put it the next day, "Pachuca sufrió para vencer [Pachuca suffered to win]." Deportivo Cuenca did not make it to the next round.

At the American embassy in Guayaquil, ten years before the game, the visa form asked if the applicant planned to work in the United States. Mauro Noboa, a few weeks out of high school, circled yes, and it was the wrong answer. "I see you circled yes," the officer told him—"I just meant that in case there's an opportunity . . ." Several months later he applied again; this time he circled no, but his past answer was brought up to deny his application. Mauro rode the bus from Cuenca to Guayaquil in search of a visa four times. After his last attempt he got very upset and almost smashed a piece of furniture. "That's fine," he thought. "If it's not the right way it'll be the bad one."

Out of the 80 Cuenca fans traveling to Mexico, no more than 15 showed up at the stadium; everyone else headed north. As his team struggled against Pachuca, Mauro rode a bus to the border. In Matamoros there was a beach party full of young Americans, and someone told Mauro to blend in and cross back with them. He liked the idea, but someone else knew about a coyote, and Mauro finally agreed. It was \$3000 per head. They took them to a house in a place called Entronque de las Gaviotas, and about a week later they waded across the Río Grande, the water up to their necks. On the other side there was a McDonald's and lots of vans parked outside. A few days later Mauro arrived at a friend's house in New Jersey.

Eventually Mauro moved to Queens, and that is where I met him. Last week—this is 2008—I stopped by his house to help him with his computer. He lives in an attic on 58th Street, across from the cemetery in Woodside. The ceiling is low but the place is spacious, and he has his own mini-fridge. Mauro likes Metallica and AC/DC, and sometimes he wears a Pink Floyd ring on his thumb. We looked at Cuenca on Google maps; he did not remember his address but we located his house. Then he showed me an area on the map and said that all of it, at some point, had been his grandfather's.

Now we are in the kitchen of the apartment where I live, not far from his house; it is Saturday night and we are drinking. "I'm the oldest brother and a bad example for the rest," he says. I ask him about his father: "If you see my dad and you see me, we look the same. My dad has a lion tattooed on his forearm, I have a panther on mine." His father does a bit of everything; he studied several things but did not finish anything, and he has always wanted to migrate. The son has inherited the father's interest in technology, and the two have worked together on inventing something, or copying it. Mauro studied electrical engineering for a while, and his dream used to be going to Germany.

He went to high school at the Benigno Malo, one of the best-known schools in Cuenca; and he was close to the principal's family, particularly his daughter. At some point Mauro was a leftist, but then "I sold out." While studying engineering he worked at a multinational company, and owned a motorcycle. His two grandmothers arrived in Ecuador from Spain, and the one on his father's side was a bit of a racist—but "I like dark-skinned women [morenas]," he smiles. He spent some time in Spain himself, but had to come back when his father got sick. Mauro has been in NYC for three years, and this one has been the worst; he has been unemployed often, and recently he was arrested after someone tried to mug him.

On the kitchen table are two bottles of wine, empty. I stand up to look for a bottle of rum that my roommate hides in the top cabinet. I have asked all of the questions, and now he wants to know about me. I tell him about my school and my F1 visa, and I even show him the I-20 form I presented at the embassy. Mauro does not seem to understand. I try to explain more, but he interrupts me: "That doesn't work for Ecuadorians," he concludes. I have had too much to drink, and I tell him that it does: "I actually do know Ecuadorians at my school."

Two foreigners lost in Queens, we speak the same language, we are drinking together. I got my student visa, he crossed the Río Grande. I come from the small portion of the Argentine middle class whose position improved over the last two or three decades. Mauro comes from an Ecuadorian middle class that suffered from the bad economy. The differences run deeper. I come from a capital city on the coast, Mauro comes from a provincial city in the highlands. The two countries have different economic histories and social structures. Our paths crossed in Queens. I am the student, he is the studied.

II. Hunted Hunter in the Immigrant Field

How should researchers introduce themselves to the people they want to study? The question is as old as participant observation.¹ One possibility is to tell the truth about who the researcher is and what he or she wants; another is not to tell it. But this is only the beginning: the truth can take on different versions, and deviating from it can be even more varied. And there are other combinations: different things can be told to different people, and the truth can change over time.²

Researchers can introduce themselves as such, or they can pretend to be someone they are not—one of the people they want to study, or someone else (a

¹ I follow Michael Burawoy (2009) in thinking of “participant observation” as more or less interchangeable with “ethnography” (23). I prefer “participant observation,” though, for two reasons. First and most important, “participant observation,” while not an oxymoron, does suggest a certain tension between its two elements (to participate and to observe can be difficult to reconcile). Burawoy recognizes the tension, but at a much more general level: “No matter how we approach our research,” he writes, “we are simultaneously participant and observer, because inescapably we live the world we study” (9). As a specific research technique, however, Burawoy’s “participant observation” does not prescribe that the researcher actually participates in the world under study: “The observer joins the participants in the rhythm of their life, in their space and their time. The observer may remain an observer (nonparticipant observation) or be an active member (participant observation)” (17). Participant observation, then, can be either participant or nonparticipant, and that is why Burawoy can use the term interchangeably with “ethnography” (which he refers to as “a commitment to studying others in their space and time” [xi]; the references to “the rhythm of *their* life,” “*their* space and *their* time,” and particularly the casual use of the word “others” suggest that the observer/participant distinction is taken for granted). The second and less important reason why I prefer “participant observation” is that it is more rooted in sociology than “ethnography.” Historian of research methods Jennifer Platt (1983 and 1996) dates the origins of “modern” participant observation in sociology to around the 1940s. The term was first used by Eduard Lindeman in 1924, and it was relatively common with the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s, but Platt draws a line between this older use and the relatively more precise modern conception of participant observation. While the first notions were limited to the use of actors as informants, the modern conception focuses on the “access to meanings through the researcher’s empathetic sharing of experience in the worlds he or she studies” (1983: 380). Platt identifies the articles by Lohman (1937) and Kluckhohn (1940) as the founding stones of “modern” participant observation.

² Gary Fine (1993) discusses the problem of more or less lying versus more or less not lying in questioning the relatively mythical aspiration to “honest ethnography” (in an article dealing with the “moral dilemmas” of field research). He distinguishes between “three strategies of information control: Deep Cover, Shallow Cover, and Explicit Cover” (276). In Deep Cover, “the researcher participates in the life of the group as a full member,” not announcing his or her research role. In Explicit Cover, “the researcher makes as complete an announcement of the goals and hypotheses of the research as possible, not worrying if this explanation will affect behavior.” Shallow Cover falls somewhere in between. Burawoy too acknowledges the two possibilities: “The observer may declare her intentions—overt participant observation—or remain incognito—covert participant observation” (2009: 17). Kluckhohn, writing at the origins of “modern” participant observation, also discusses the investigator’s decision “as to whether it is advisable to reveal his research objectives (1940: 333).

customer, for instance, if the people under study have something to sell, or someone serving the “community” in some capacity). Attempts to become part of the world to be studied can be traced to Jack London’s ([1903] 1970) *The People of the Abyss*, an account of the author’s “sinking myself down” into the East End of London. To go undercover can offer more direct, frequent and informal access to the “locals.” But this approach is often less about access than immersion: the point is to understand by experience, to become one’s own informant.³

The researcher as an explicit outsider, in turn, is typified by the travel writer, and also by the anthropologist. The distance between the observer and the participant can be too vast for the observer to pass as one of the participants, to pretend that he or she belongs in the local world. Some version of the truth must be told. By introducing themselves as such, researchers give up the chance to report about the social world

³ Beatrice Potter Webb’s (1888) “Pages from a Work-Girl’s Diary”—a brief account of the author’s furtive work at a garment factory also in East London—predates *The People of the Abyss* ([1903] 1970). The later tradition of first-hand undercover reporting of poverty and low-income work ranges from George Orwell’s (1933) *Down and Out in London and Paris* to Barbara Ehrenreich’s (2001) *Nickel and Dimed* (and more recently Gabriel Thompson’s [2010] *Working in the Shadows*). The methods employed to disguise the researcher’s identity are sometimes discussed openly, sometimes not. Beatrice Webb writes: “At the next shop window I look nervously at my reflection, and am startled at my utterly forlorn appearance—destitute enough to be ‘sweated’ by any master” (1888: 302). Erving Goffman’s *Asylums* (1961), based on fieldwork at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington DC, is another famous example of undercover research: “I started out in the role of an assistant to the athletic director, when pressed avowing to be a student of recreation and community life, and I passed the day with patients, avoiding sociable contact with the staff and the carrying of a key. I did not sleep in the wards, and the top hospital management knew what my aims were” (ix). In an informal talk “On Fieldwork” in 1974, Goffman cautioned his audience: “You have to anticipate being questioned by the people whom you study so you engage in providing a story that will hold up should the facts be brought to their attention” (2001: 155). And he adds: “In the early years of this business, we frowned upon total participant observation, that is total passing in the field, because people had very fancy notions about what it would be like to be discredited. I don’t mean moral issues, I mean concerns about the fact that they would be discovered and humiliated. I think, at least in my experience, it’s proven to be a fact that that’s much exaggerated and that you can act as though you’re somebody you’re not and get away with it for a year or two. Whether you want to do that, of course, is another issue, one that bears on ethical and professional issues attached to participant observation” (155). Fine (1993) focuses his discussion of “honest ethnography” on the question of “informed consent.” He writes: “Research subjects, many say, have a *right* to know what they are getting themselves into. Such a sentiment sounds proper and has been institutionalized through a maze of federal and academic regulations. However, this advice is contrary to the writings of classic ethnographers (and other methodologists) who are concerned about ‘reactivity’—those who want their research ‘clean.’ Two valued goals conflict” (274). Fine provides references to the “vigorous and heated debate in the 1960s about the legitimacy of disguised, covert observation” (276).

from the inside—to experiment with their own body. On the other hand, if the researcher is acknowledged, distance can make it easier to gather more formal data: the observer can ask questions more openly, claiming to control the conversation in ways the participant cannot.⁴

⁴ As Platt (1983) reports in a note about the connections between participant observation in sociology and anthropology, Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) is regarded as "the founding text in the tradition of participation as an ethnographic technique." As is to be expected in the study of "extremely alien societies," however, Malinowski "did not engage in participant observation as now conceived, observing and interrogating the natives much more than he participated in their life" (Platt 1983: 392). In this sense participant observation stands in contrast to library research ("Participant observation . . . simply codes the assumption that the raw material of ethnographic research lies out there in the activities of the people you're interested in" [Agar 1996: 31]); Malinowski was among the first to bring anthropology "off the verandah," but not to the point of "sinking himself down" into the local world or "passing" for one of the locals himself. (Malinowski's personal diary, published posthumously in 1967, revealed that the distance between the author and the "natives" was in fact greater than it had been assumed. As Clifford Geertz (1974) put it: "The myth of the chameleon field-worker, perfectly self-tuned to his exotic surroundings—a walking miracle of empathy tact, patience, and cosmopolitanism—was demolished by the man who had perhaps done the most to create it" [27]. The researcher's "empathetic sharing of experience in the worlds he or she studies" (as Platt defines the "modern" version of participant observation in sociology [1983: 380]) is not central to anthropology. Geertz writes: "Understanding the form and pressure of, to use the dangerous word one more time, natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke—or, as I have suggested, reading a poem—than it is like achieving communion" [1974: 45].) Participant observers in sociology have typically studied less "alien" groups than anthropologists, so "passing" has been relatively easier; but they have often nonetheless revealed their identity and purpose—at least to some extent. In the 1955 Appendix to *Street Corner Society*, William Foote Whyte (1993) reports that his study really began when he met his famous informant, Doc, and told him about his plans: "As I remember it, I said that I had been interested in congested city districts in my college study but had felt very remote from them. I hoped to study the problems in such a district. I felt I could do very little as an outsider. Only if I could get to know the people and learn their problems first-hand would I be able to gain the understanding I needed." Doc was ready to help: "Well, any nights you want to see anything, I'll take you around. I can take you to the joints—gambling joints—I can take you around to the street corners. Just remember that you're my friend. That's all they need to know" (291). By only telling his key informant about his research goals, Whyte could participate in the life of "Cornerville" almost as if he were one of the local boys he wanted to study; for anyone other than Doc he was merely Doc's friend (at least in the beginning). In the prologue to his study of boxing, Loic Wacquant (2004) writes: "In point of fact, I did not enter the boxing club with the express aim of dissecting the pugilistic world. My original intention was to use the gym as a 'window' onto the ghetto so as to observe the social strategies of young men in the neighborhood—my initial object of study—and it was not until after sixteen months of assiduous attendance, and after I had been inducted as a bona fide member of the inner circle of the Boys Club, that I decided, with the approval of those concerned, to make the craft of the boxer an object of study in its own right" (9). For the first sixteen months of his fieldwork, Wacquant did not have to explain to the people at the gym that he was thinking of writing about them, because he was not: his initial object of study was something else. In other cases the author's identity as researcher is central to his or her interaction with the "locals." Mitchell Duneier (1999) met Hakim Hasan—one of the people he writes about in *Sidewalk*, his book about street booksellers in Greenwich Village—when he saw another one of his books for sale at Hasan's table. Yet even in this case the author was not always perceived as an academic researcher (as he found out almost accidentally when hearing a conversation between two of his informants that was captured on his tape recorder when he

In June 2007 I arrived in New York City with the idea of studying undocumented immigration, but no plan on where to begin. I never imagined that becoming part of the immigrant world was an option. I thought that some sort of volunteer work could facilitate entrance, but not that I could pass for an immigrant myself. The immigrant experience did not seem possible to replicate: immigration, unlike the poverty of the East End, is defined legally; and more importantly, immigration is too critically shaped by the immigrant's past. My goal was merely to listen to the migrants and convey what they had to say. I planned to introduce myself as someone working on a school project about immigrant life, then try to schedule interviews.⁵

I remember having breakfast at a coffee shop in Woodside, Queens, a few days after arriving: everyone looked like the kind of people I wanted to interview. My first target was talking to anyone I could; parks and Laundromats were my best bets. People were cautious, though, as in any big city, not likely to trust anyone with revelations about their life. It was difficult to explain who I was and what I wanted; references to immigration seemed to put people on guard. A few times I engaged

was not present [336-8]). What these different examples suggest is that the researcher's identity and goals are seldom clear to the people he or she studies, even when he or she does his or her best to be clear. There may be "strategic issues" that the researcher cannot control (Whyte); researchers themselves may be unsure about their goals (Wacquant); and—more generally—sociological research can arouse suspicion (Duneier).

⁵ Sociological participant observation has been common in the study of "street life" and "urban poverty," going back to the Chicago school. More recent examples, in addition to the books already mentioned, include Anderson 1990 and 1999, and Venkatesh 2008; see also the special issue of *Ethnography* (December 2009) on "urban ethnography." Participant observation has been less common in the sociology of immigration. In her study of Dominicans in Boston Peggy Levitt (2001) reports about living with a Dominican family in the "sending community" she studies, where, among many other activities, she "sought relief from the afternoon heat alongside my neighbors, drinking coffee under the wide shade trees" (27). But the author does not explicitly draw from this experience, and—more tellingly—she does not include participant observation as one of the six research strategies she details in the methodological appendix. In *Mexican New York*, on the other hand, Robert Smith's (2006) appendix on methodology abundantly refers to his involvement with the Mexican community in New York City, even though the book itself has fewer references to this participation. In both cases participant observation seems to be more about access to the people under study than immersion in the local world (that is to say, the older rather than the modern understanding of participant observation, following Platt's [1983] distinction).

people in conversation and even got their numbers, but no one picked up the phone when I called.

Established community organizations made it much easier. To the extent that I was acknowledged by the staff, people would trust me more. I started to take part in meetings, mostly about civil and social rights. I met with staff members to discuss my plans, explaining that I was a graduate student in sociology working on a dissertation. But they did not seem to be listening; they let me talk about my research ideas, but that was it. For them I was another prospective member, and recruiting new members was most of what they cared about. I had thought of the meetings as an occasion to meet immigrants that I could eventually interview. If I was to spend time at the organizations' offices, however, it seemed that my presence had to be justified.

I signed up as a member of two organizations and started to participate more actively. My hope was to go unseen, but the meetings were small and there was nowhere to hide. Before every meeting, the organizer in charge would have us go around the room introducing ourselves. It was not only that I felt the need to mask or at least soften my Argentine accent (participants were mostly Colombians, Ecuadorians, Mexicans, and Dominicans); introductions could include such ice-breakers as "say your name and then an adjective that starts with your initial and tells us something about who you are." Carla *cute*, Sebastián *smart*, Pedro *problematic* . . . My turn approached and I could not come up with anything acceptable starting with n. Introductions were difficult—sweat poured from my forehead.

In the beginning I would look at the organizers, expecting that they would explain who I was. But they did not seem to recognize my presence as different. I would just introduce myself briefly, saying something like, "I moved nearby recently and I'm looking to meet new people," not lying and not telling the truth. Both

members and staff seemed to accept my frequent attendance naturally (and it did not take long before they would complain if I did not show up). I volunteered every time the organizers asked me to translate materials, make phone calls, go to pickets, interpret for lawyers, and a few other tasks. If they ever took note of the reason behind my presence—the dissertation—they soon chose to forget it. They did not like the idea of dealing with an observer; it was easier to treat me like anybody else.

The immigrants at the meetings did not seem to see me as particularly different, either. As much as I feared people rejecting my intrusion, it did not look as if they noticed me. Again, I did not hide the fact that I was a graduate student; but “graduate student” meant little for them, and “sociology” was not exactly easy to recognize. Speaking some English did make me different from most immigrants, but my accent set me apart from the American organizers as well. After several months of picketing at an abusive employer’s house in Queens, one of the Mexican workers who had sued the boss asked me if I also worked in construction. “Not really,” I stuttered, instinctively hiding my hands, so obviously alien to physical work. How come he had not seen the difference? The boundaries, it seemed, were blurrier than I had thought.

Hiding my hands, or changing the way I spoke, could not disguise that I was different from the immigrants I wanted to study. And yet the differences seemed to get lost. The organizers at the community organizations happily ignored my research agenda, and immigrants seemed ready to welcome another lost soul. My plan for being the interviewer had little chance to prevail. As they accepted me and I felt more comfortable, I realized that insisting on my difference was useless, or worse. I kept using the word “school” when I had to, but it meant less and less. I did not openly lie, but I started speaking the hazy immigrant language myself, and I gave up on fully explaining what I did. Different? Back home we were all different—now we were in New York.

Some observers try to be participants and fail; the social fabric they are studying may be too tight, or they may not work hard enough to disguise who they are. My experience in the field was the opposite: I planned not to participate, and I failed. Some observers say who they are, some do not. I said who I was but there was no one to listen. I was convinced that I was too different, and it turned out that I was not different enough (or rather that I was not seen as different enough). As much as it meant to me, the difference between “school” and work was lost in their eyes; the difference between foreigner and immigrant too subtle for anyone to pay attention. Over time, in fact, though not very frequently, there were actually some almost magical moments when I did not feel so different myself.⁶

To participate in the two community organizations was the beginning. It helped me make contacts and talk to many different people, but also to get involved in aspects of immigrant life I would not have seen otherwise. As an English-Spanish interpreter for attorneys working with immigrant clients, I witnessed the interaction between the migrants and the law in many different cases, including immigrants in detention.⁷ I also had the chance, through a series of circumstances, to spend time with immigrants at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens.⁸ Although little about these cases will be

⁶ Wacquant (2004) quotes a note from his days at the boxing gym: “I feel so much pleasure simply *participating* that *observation* becomes secondary and, frankly, I’m at the point where I tell myself that I’d gladly give up my studies and my research and all the rest to be able to stay here and box, to remain ‘one of the boys’” (2004: 4). I also told myself more than once that I would gladly give up my studies; the reason, however, was not that I was happy to participate, but that I found it difficult to participate and observe at the same time. On the difference between foreigner and immigrant, Pierre Bourdieu, in his prologue to Abdelmalek Sayad, describes the foreigner as “a member of that privileged category to which real immigrants will never have access and which can, in the best of cases, enjoy all the advantages that come from having two nationalities, two languages, two homelands and two cultures” ([1999] 2007: xii).

⁷ I worked as an interpreter with an attorney from the Legal Aid Society in New York City in four cases with immigrants fighting deportation, either through cancelation of removal or applying for asylum. Two of the immigrants were Dominican, one from El Salvador, and one from Panama. We visited them several times at two county jails in New Jersey as the attorney prepared them for their hearings before the judge. The four of them were legal permanent residents who had been convicted of minor crimes. Two had AIDS.

⁸ I volunteered with a survey about language access in the New York City hospitals carried out by the New York Immigration Coalition, and thus learned about hospitals taking it upon themselves to repatriate immigrants without insurance or anyone to take care of them (as reported by the *New York*

discussed in the following chapters, they did contribute to shaping my perception of the immigrant world. Jails and hospitals are not the typical setting of immigrant life, but they reveal eloquently some of its truth.

All in all I spent 18 months doing uninterrupted fieldwork in NYC, mostly in Queens. As planned, I did formal and informal interviews with documented and undocumented immigrants, initially from any Latin American countries, then largely from Ecuador. Sooner than later, however, my plan switched from doing interviews to getting as close as possible to the immigrants I wanted to study—to see as much of their life as I could, to “sink myself down” into their life. I never got to be an immigrant myself, of course. But I tried to be close to them in my capacity of providing assistance, company, and unconditional listening to anything they wanted to say. As time went by and I started to grasp the local “language,” I narrowed my focus down to fewer cases, working to build extended conversations with some of them. Thus I amassed the material that I present and analyze in the dissertation.

My position was always ambiguous. I could never really explain what I wanted or who I was, and my double agenda was troubling and tiresome. I was similar to and different from them. I was observer and participant. I was very close and very far away. In the spirit of Goffman’s ([1974] 2001) rules, I was devoted to my field, I had little life of my own.⁹ Like most researchers in the eyes of the people they study, I was

Times [Sontag 2008] for Guatemalan Luis Alberto Jiménez). After some paperwork and medical exams I was allowed into the Geriatric Unit at Elmhurst Hospital, a hospital where about 40% of the patients are Spanish-speaking. My job was to spend time with the patients (I was not allowed to interpret for them, but I did it the few times doctors asked me to). Not all of the patients were elderly people, but many were long-term patients, and most seemed to have no one to come and see them. I was at the Unit for four hours a day, three times a week, for about two months.

⁹ In the talk “On Fieldwork” mentioned above, Goffman says to his audience: “Now the next thing you have to do is cut your life to the bone, as much as you can afford to cut it down. Except for a few murder mysteries or something you can bring along in case you get really depressed, remove yourself from all resources. One of the problems of going in with a spouse, of course, is that while you can get more material on members of the opposite sex (especially if you go in with a kid), it does give you a way out. You can talk to that person, and all that, and that’s no way to make a world. The way to make a world is to be naked to the bone, to have as few resources as you can get by with” ([1974] 2001: 155-6).

the proverbial stranger, with no visible roots and no visible plans, coming out of the blue and disappearing again.¹⁰ And that might be why it was surprisingly easy to blend in. The more I tried to be an outsider, the more of an insider I was. How could I be the stranger when so was everyone else?

III. Ecuadorean Emigration: A Labyrinth on the Move

The morning after drinking with Mauro Noboa I had to be in Corona. From Woodside I took the Flushing-bound No. 7 train and got off at 103rd Street. I walked four blocks up 104th Street and reached Macario Correa's house. I rang the bell at the iron fence and waited on the curbside; a black SUV was parked in the driveway. Macario owns the house; his family lives on one floor and they rent out the other one. We sat down at the dining table and almost immediately started practicing writing (Macario's citizenship test was coming up soon). I dictated sentences and he wrote them down.

¹⁰ The reference to Simmel's stranger ([1908] 1971) to describe the researcher comes from Dennison Nash's (1963) "The Ethnologist as Stranger." It is also in the title of Agar's introduction to ethnography (1996) *The Professional Stranger*. Simmel's portrayal of the stranger focuses on the trader, never mentioning the researcher or intellectual. On the other hand, Simmel does write about the "objectivity" of the stranger (145-6). And that is not the only parallel Simmel draws between the stranger and the researcher or intellectual, even when he does not use these words. More relevant in the context of participant observation is that the stranger—particularly "the stranger who moves on"—"often receives the most surprising revelations and confidences, at times reminiscent of a confessional, about matters which are kept carefully hidden from everybody with whom one is close" (145). These two features suggest connections between Simmel's stranger and the participant observer. Alfred Schutz's (1944) portrayal of the stranger is very different from Simmel's. (The main difference, as I understand it, is that Simmel thinks of the stranger as a more or less permanent type of relationship—the key example is the trader—whereas in Schutz's description the stranger is defined less by a permanent relationship than by a more or less transitory process of adjustment that someone goes through—the key example is the immigrant.) Schutz, however, starts off by referring to the sociologist as stranger, insofar as "any phenomenon of the social world" has "a different aspect for the sociologist and for the man who acts and thinks within it" (500). (The sociologist, in Schutz's discussion, may be the permanent stranger, while the immigrant is assumed to be the more or less temporary stranger.) Schutz also emphasizes objectivity, but not in the same way as Simmel—once again, Schutz has the immigrant in mind: "The deeper reason for his objectivity . . . lies in his own bitter experience of the limits of the 'thinking as usual,' which has taught him that a man may lose [sic] his status, his rules of guidance, and even his history and that the normal way of life is always far less guaranteed than it seems. Therefore, the stranger discerns, frequently with a grievous clear-sightedness, the rising of a crisis which may menace the whole foundation of the 'relatively natural conception of the world,' while all those symptoms pass unnoticed by the members of the in-group, who rely on the continuance of their customary way of life" (507). Is this the immigrant or the sociologist? It may be difficult to tell. Alfred Schutz was born in Vienna and came to the United States in 1939 at 40 years of age.

His wife was in the kitchen, and half an hour into the practice he told her to serve me food. I said I was fine, and he was surprised. I told him last night I had been drinking. He smiled and told his wife I did not want anything.

Ecuadorians are the third-largest foreign group in Queens, and Corona is the heart of Ecuadorian Queens. At the time of the 2000 Census 10% of the total population in the Jackson Heights-Corona-Elmhurst area had been born in Ecuador.¹¹ I had been helping with citizenship classes at an organization on Roosevelt Avenue, and that is where I met Macario. He was shorter and darker-skinned than the other Ecuadorians in the class, and when he took off his sweater I could read “Vencer o Morir [Victory or Death]” tattooed on the inside of his lower right arm. After doing several mock citizenship interviews I became familiar with the information on his N-400 form. He was born in 1961, came to the United States in 1989, gained legal permanent residency in 2002. He lives with his wife and three children, and he has worked for 16 years in a restaurant near Union Square in Manhattan.¹²

The N-400 form does not ask where Macario is from in Ecuador. Located in the Ecuadorian Southern highlands, Biblián is one of the rural villages in the Cañar and Azuay provinces that have played a key role in the history of Ecuadorian migration to New York City.

¹¹ This is the combination of Community District 3 (where Macario lives, north of Roosevelt Avenue, including the neighborhoods of East Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, North Corona) and Community District 4 (south of Roosevelt Avenue, including the neighborhoods of Corona, Corona Heights, Elmhurst, Lefrak City, and South Corona). In 2000 about 48% of all Ecuadorians in Queens (66,643) lived in one of these two districts (the source is the 2000 US Census). Many Ecuadorians (7,340) lived in Community District 2 (including the neighborhoods of Blissville, Hunters Point, Long Island City, Sunnyside, Sunnyside Gardens, and Woodside—where I lived). The three districts combined accounted for 59% of the Ecuadorian population in Queens.

¹² The N-400 goes on in my head, mechanically, and Macario answers. He does not owe any federal, state, or local taxes that are overdue. He has never been a member of or in any way associated with the Communist Party, any other totalitarian party, or a terrorist organization. He has never committed a crime or offense for which he was not arrested. He understands the full Oath of Allegiance and is willing to take it. And he is also willing, should the law require it, to take up arms on behalf of the United States.

Outmigration from this area can be traced back to seasonal journeys to work in the coastal economy, but at some point in the 1960s internal circular migration began turning into long-term international migration. Déleg (Cañar province) is said to be the first village to send off migrants to New York City, possibly in the 1950s, following the route of the declining “Panama hat” export business. The flow extended to other villages, growing in the 1960s and 1970s, and becoming massive in the 1980s. An analysis of four “pueblos de migrantes [migrant villages]” in Azuay and Cañar in the early 1990s showed that most emigrants were male, young, and often recently married; their formal education level tended to be low, but typically they were “somewhere in between the poorest—for whom traveling is limited because of the cost—and the richest—for whom there is no real economic motivation” (Carpio 1992: 92). While the first migration networks were made up of relatively well established families, eventually all but the lowest strata of rural society engaged in the migratory process.¹³

¹³ The production and export of the Panama hat—made in the Ecuadorian Southern highlands but named after the point from where it was shipped to the rest of the world—declined in the 1950s, leaving some 10,000 weavers in the Azuay and Cañar provinces without their source of income (Carpio 1992: 37). (The history of the Panama hat trail is told by journalist and travel writer Tom Miller [1986] 2001). Roberto Pinos, from Déleg, is said to be the first emigrant to New York City, possibly in the 1940s. He is the person “who would change the destiny of thousands of people in South-Central Ecuador. His story of adventures and ‘the lost dog,’ as his fellow countrymen called him, opened up the possibility for entire villages, overwhelmed by want and lack of work, to conceive of new expectations and orient themselves to a new north, New York” (Carpio 1992: 82; my translation). Carpio writes more about the pioneers: “. . . the pioneers from the Déleg county seat were socially in the middle, respected and connected to the local elite, but without enough resources to be part of it. It was that group of local families alternating between basic comforts and the threat of ruin, and who don’t want the same destiny for their children, and thus send them to study in the city. From that world of frustration and nostalgia for an old past—families with 10 or 12 children—sprang up the adventurers, youth early fed up with their peasant and provincial condition who, to break with their own routine and without knowing it, opened up a route of hope that would take them and many others abroad” (1992: 76-7; my translation). Astudillo and Cordero (1990) draw an intense picture of the phases of emigration from the region. They distinguish between migrants from the rural villages (rural origin, they say, but not peasant origin—most people came from the county or parish seats [10] and the so-called “cholo boys” leaving from the city of Cuenca: these are mostly “young people from the good families, sons of the absentee landowners, a sort of provincial nobility, living in the city off the work of the countryside,” whose financial position is on the decline (11). By the 1980s emigration to the United States has extended to all but the lowest strata in the rural highlands, with people with few resources often borrowing the money for the trip from the more established families—at high interest rates (Carpio 1992: 88 and 102).

Rural Ecuador is highly stratified, and not everyone coming from the rural Southern highlands is of peasant background. Macario's tattoo, for example, reflects his years all over the country as an Ecuadorian Army corporal. But the differences between rural migrants from Azuay and Cañar do tend to get lost when comparing them with urban Ecuadorians. When I first asked Macario where he was from, he said Cuenca, the capital of Azuay province and third largest city in Ecuador. Only later did he tell me he was from Biblián. "People will answer Cuenca," he explained, "because it's better known." Mauro Noboa, himself born and raised in Cuenca, put it differently: "If you ask Ecuadorians here, they will all say they're from Cuenca. And they are from the countryside—villages without even a high school." The difference between "Cuenca" (meaning rural Azuay and Cañar) and "Cuenca Cuenca" (the actual city) hints at the urban/rural divide within the migratory flow from the Southern highlands.

Moreover, the flow from Azuay and Cañar was not the only one to make it to New York City relatively early. Emigrants from the coast—mostly from Guayaquil, the largest Ecuadorian city and main port, but also from other places—started to arrive in the 1960s as well, if not before. In 1975, for instance, the *New York Times* ran an article on the Jackson Heights-Corona-Elmhurst area featuring several Ecuadorians, including Leonora Rivas, an older woman from Daule (Guayas province): "I got here before this passion to come to New York got started," she recalled. "Back then it was lonely to arrive at the airport all by yourself. Now it's different. They say everybody in Guayaquil has a relative in New York."¹⁴

See also Kyle (2000: 59-60) for more on the Panama hat trail and Pribilsky's (2007: 35-68) historical introduction to international migration from the Azuayo-Cañari region.

¹⁴ At the time of the interview Leonora Rivas had been working in New York City factories for 20 years (suggesting she had arrived in the mid 1950s). Her two sons had joined her from Ecuador, but both had eventually died—one in a car accident, the other fighting with the US Armed Forces in Vietnam. Every Saturday she made 165 *humitas* to sell at the weekly dance at the Ecuadorian Cultural and Social Center on Roosevelt Avenue in Queens (Cowan and Cowan 1975). Emigration from the coast was connected to both the movement of ships and the presence of American companies in the area (Standard Fruit,

To determine precisely the place of origin of Ecuadorians in the United States is not easy. The US Census Bureau records information about Ecuadorians in the United States, but it only captures the migrants' present; there are no questions about the migrants' life before migrating. The Ecuadorian Census Bureau (INEC), on the other hand, finds it more difficult to gather information about the migrants' current situation, since emigrants are not there to answer the questions. But surveys in the country of origin do collect data about the emigrants' background by interviewing the households emigrants left behind.

The main problem with this approach is that it only counts those emigrants who have part of their household in Ecuador. Because the Census works territorially, "household" is defined in terms of dwelling, so only emigrants whose former households are still living together in the sending country will be recorded—in other words, mostly relatively recent emigrants. When the Ecuadorian INEC tried to count some of the country's missing population for the first time—as part of the 2001

now Dole, operated in Daule, where Leonora was from, a center of tropical fruit production). Guido Zambrano Castillo (1998) writes a few pages about emigration from the coast, not only Guayaquil but also other coastal provinces, such as Manabí and El Oro (52-57). David Kyle has this footnote in his book: "Perhaps the greatest gap in our understanding of international migration from Ecuador to the United States is information on the migrant pioneers from Guayaquil, which this book does not attempt to investigate" (2000: 31). The 1933 novel *El Muelle*, written by one of Ecuador's best-known intellectuals, Alfredo Pareja Diez-Canseco, describes the life of a Guayaquilean seaman in New York City during the Depression. The novel has references to Latino neighborhoods and Mexican restaurants, and particularly to immigrant jobs and Latino workers—were it not for the speakeasies and bootlegging, everything looks strangely contemporary. The fact that people refer to the main character as "Ecuador" confirms that there were not many Ecuadorians in New York City back then. (There are many other historical connections between Ecuador and the United States: at least one Ecuadorian president was born in New York City—Galo Plaza in 1906—and two of them studied here: León Febres Cordero graduated as an engineer from the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ, and current president Rafael Correa received his doctorate in economics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.) On a crisp autumn day in 2008 Guayaquilean José Torre invited me to try Dominican chicharrones in Corona, and told me about his first years in New York City upon arriving from Guayaquil in 1962, following his stepfather, a motor-boat repairman, who had come in 1959. He said that most Ecuadorians in New York City in the 1960s were from Guayaquil and lived in the Bronx (he remembered his soccer team: "Vendaval del Bronx"). Ecuadorians did not start moving to Queens until the 1970s, he told me. The US Census recorded 7,670 Ecuadorians in the country in 1960; 36,663 in 1970; 86,128 in 1980; and 143,314 in 1990. One of the few literary accounts of early Ecuadorian emigration to New York City that I have found is the autobiographical novel *Enigmas del Destino* (Espinosa 1998): the main character arrives in New York City in 1970 and settles in the Bronx (he comes from the Northern highlands, though).

Census—the questions were restricted to households with emigrants having left in the five years before the Census (1996-2001). The total number for United States emigrants recorded in the census was 101,006 (certainly much less than the total number of Ecuadorians in the United States).

Table 1: Ecuadorian Emigrants to the United States by Area of Origin 1996-2001

Area of Origin	US Emigrants	Total Ecuador
Total Urban	65%	61%
Total Rural	35%	39%
Rural Azuay and Cañar	25%	3%
Urban Guayas (Guayaquil)	20%	22%
Urban Azuay and Cañar (Cuenca)	16%	3%
Urban Pichincha (Quito)	14%	14%
Rest of the Country	25%	57%
Total Costa (Coast)	27%	50%
Total Sierra (Highlands)	68%	45%
Total Oriente (Amazonia)	5%	5%

Source: INEC Census (2001)

The numbers in Table 1—based on the 2001 Ecuadorian census—show that rural migration from the Southern highlands is indeed the most important component of recent Ecuadorian emigration to the United States—one quarter comes from rural Azuay and Cañar, much above its share of the Ecuadorian population (25% versus 3%). Likewise, Cuenca (along with other smaller urban areas in Azuay and Cañar) is much overrepresented among the emigrants (16% versus 3% of the non-emigrant population). But the emigration numbers also reflect the relative size of Ecuador's largest cities. Together, the emigrants from Guayaquil and Quito make up 34% of

1996-2001 emigration to the United States, and on the whole as much as 65% of the migrants come from urban areas.¹⁵

Students of Ecuadorian emigration in the United States have focused on migrants of rural origin (Kyle 2000, Pribilsky 2007, and—to some extent—Miles 2004). Emigrants of urban background, on the other hand, have been largely absent from studies of Ecuadorians in the United States. One reason is that the cities they leave behind are too large for their absence to be noticed. In the countryside, on the contrary, the impact of emigration is much more evident—8% of Cañar and 5% of Azuay rural populations left for the United States between 1996 and 2001 (many more had left before). Thus there are “pueblos de migrantes [migrant villages]” that have seen their population shrink almost dramatically.¹⁶ Another reason is that Latin American cities have always been thought of as recipients, not senders of migrants;

¹⁵ Since internal migration has been very active, it is surely the case that some of the “urban” emigrants were not born in the city, but moved in from the countryside (the numbers will record this person as an “urban” emigrant only if his or her “household” moved in to the city as well). At the time of the 1990 Census, 19% of Ecuadorians were living a province different from the province where they had been born (Sosa 1994: 17), with Guayas (Guayaquil) and Pichincha (Quito) being by far the largest receivers. Anthropologist Ann Miles’s (2004) wonderful study of the Quitasaca family’s migration from rural Cumbe to urban Cuenca (in the early 1980s) and then to New York City (the son in 1995, the father in 2000) suggests, however, that not so much time is required for the city to make an impact. More generally, the rural/urban categories are problematic. For one thing the Ecuadorian Census Bureau defines urban and rural based on administrative, not demographic, criteria (an area will be defined as an urban area if it is, for instance, a county seat, even if its population is sparse). By and large there is a relation between administrative status and population size, but it is still the case that some urban areas are far more urban than others. Also, once again, internal migration makes it difficult to determine who comes from where.

¹⁶ The village of Déleg, land of emigrant pioneers in the Cañar province, saw its population shrink from 12,000 in the 1960s to 6,000 in 2001 (INEC). A website about Déleg reports: “En la década de los cincuentas, aparecen los primeros emigrantes a los Estados Unidos de Norte América, de preferencia a la ciudad de Nueva York; en la actualidad, mas del 60% de la población esta ‘Yanquisizada,’ de los indígenas sólo quedan los apellidos. Con esta fuga del capital humano, como saldo del mismo, han surgido problemas familiares y religiosos, si bien, se ha experimentado un repunto económico con la importancia del dólar, paradójicamente invertido fuera de Déleg” (<http://www.deleg.com/04historia.html> [retrieved 09/23/10]). See also Zibell’s (2003) BBC story about Déleg, reporting that Déleg’s mayor at the time, Jorge Flores, had his seven siblings and his mother in the United States.

and they do not fit the picture of the “sending community” that has dominated research on immigration in the United States.¹⁷

The rural/urban distinction matters. For one thing, the gender ratio varies substantially. Emigrants from Biblián were 66% male in 1996-2001, whereas the emigration gender ratio in Guayaquil was 50/50. For the whole country rural migration was only 28% female; urban migration was 43% female. But gender is not the only difference between rural and urban emigration. In Ecuador, rural background is associated with less formal education, more poverty, and the stigma inherited from an agricultural system where peasants were subject to widespread abuse. As Mauro Noboa’s anxiety to distinguish between “Cuenca” and “Cuenca Cuenca” suggests, the powerful rural/urban distinction has emigrated with the emigrants.

Yet the urban/rural line is not the only one dividing Ecuadorians abroad. As Table 1 shows, while Ecuadorians from the highlands are overrepresented in the United States (at least among 1996-2001 emigrants), about one-third of emigrants come from the coast. Regionalism is central to Ecuadorian history—the country has long been culturally and politically divided between the highlands [sierra] and the coast [costa]. And the urban/rural and sierra/costa distinctions do not overlap. Urbanization on the coast is higher than in the highlands, and Guayaquil is the most populous city and main port; but both Quito and Cuenca—the second and third largest cities in the country—are above 8000 feet, and there is also an important rural

¹⁷ The focus on the “sending community” may be the legacy of a previous era of immigration studies: many of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants came from regions that did not see themselves as part of a larger country, and thus the “community” of origin was the immigrants’ only reference. Recent books on transnationalism continue this approach: Peggitt (2001) focuses on the Dominican village Miraflores, Smith (2006) focuses on the Mexican village Ticuani. One reason may be that research in the country of origin is facilitated by focusing on a relatively small “sending community.” Another reason may be that lasting engagement in the place of origin—a central tenet of transnationalism—is more visible when the place of origin is smaller (or, in other words, when the emigrants are a relatively large proportion of the population).

population on the coast. The two distinctions combine in different ways and provide much of the language for Ecuador's intricate hierarchy, both in Ecuador and abroad.¹⁸

Towards the end of the 1990s Ecuadorian emigration took on a different dimension. Amid an abysmal financial crisis, the “panic to leave” (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002) or the “Ecuadorian stampede” (Ramírez and Ramírez 2005) pushed the number of net exits from 22,712 per year (average 1976-1997) to 40,735 in 1998, 91,108 in 1999, and 175,922 in 2000. Since then the numbers have come down, reflecting somewhat less emigration but also increased immigration from neighboring Colombia and Perú into Ecuador (in 2000 Ecuador surrendered its sovereign currency for the American dollar, creating an incentive for neighbors to immigrate). The United States, long the main destination for Ecuadorians, now took the back seat to Spain, where Ecuadorians soared from 21,734 in 2000 to 470,090 in 2004.¹⁹

The massive flow from Ecuador to Spain hailed from all over the country, but it was more urban than the emigration to the United States. For the 1996-2001 period, 65% of emigrants to the United States and 74% of emigrants to Spain came from cities (25% came from Quito, the capital city, versus 14% of those leaving for the United States). Additionally, women accounted for a larger share of the urban emigrants: 43% of the urban emigrants to Spain versus 38% of the urban emigrants to the United States (in Guayaquil 56% of emigrants to Spain were women). And emigration to Spain also had more of a “middle-class” background: it was more formally educated—

¹⁸ Some useful and lively introductions to Ecuadorian regionalism are Miguel Donoso Pareja's *Ecuador: Identidad o Esquizofrenia* (1998), Jorge Enrique Adoum's *Ecuador: Señas Particulares* (1998), and Juan Valdano's *Identidad y Formas de lo Ecuatoriano* (2005). The authors examine Ecuadorian national and regional identities ranging from soccer to music to politics to food to literature—and much more.

¹⁹ The data on net exits are from a report by FLACSO (2008: 16). Based on the 2001 Ecuadorian Census, 186,111 Ecuadorians left for Spain and 101,006 for the United States in 1996-2001; Italy was the third destination with 37,361. The numbers of Ecuadorians in Spain are reported by FLACSO 2008: 66. In 2010 the estimate for Ecuadorians in Spain is 395,069 (INE 2010)—this is 16% smaller than the 2004 number, but high enough to make Ecuadorians the third largest foreign-born population in Spain (after Romanians and Moroccans).

68% of those leaving for Spain versus 58% of those leaving for the United States had a high school education or more—and more were either employers or self-employed than was the case for the United States (31% versus 22%).²⁰

The literature has turned these differences into two emigrant types (Gratton 2005 and 2007). On the one hand, the “old” emigrants to the United States were male, relatively poor, and of rural origin—mostly peasants from Azuay and Cañar. On the other hand, the “new” emigrants to Spain are female, urban, and of “middle-class” background—largely from Quito and Guayaquil. As one author sums up this allegedly “novel phenomenon in the history of emigration,” the thrust of the “new” Ecuadorian emigration to Spain are the “Married daughters of the middle classes of a Third-World country [who] left children and husbands behind and set out on the road” (Gratton 2007: 596).²¹

As said above, statistical agencies in the country of origin have trouble gathering information about the emigrants, who are not there to answer the questions. Statistical sources in the country of destination, on the other hand, ask few if any questions about who the emigrants were in their home country (such as where they come from). But they are more effective at gathering information about the present, and also at counting the emigrants. Asking households about members who left between 1996 and 2001, the Ecuadorian 2001 Census counted 101,006 United States-bound emigrants. The US Census Bureau counted 298,625 Ecuadorians in the United

²⁰ The data about education and employment does not come from the 2001 Census (the Census did not ask about education or employment of the emigrants) but from the Survey on Employment, Unemployment, and Underemployment (ENEMDU) of September 2007. The survey only covered urban areas and asked households about all Ecuadorians residing abroad (the 2001 Census covered both rural and urban areas but it was limited to those who had left in the previous five years, 1996-2001).

²¹ Several articles in the volumes *La Migración Ecuatoriana* (Herrera, Carrillo, and Torres 2005) and *Nuevas Migraciones Latinoamericanas a Europa* (Herrera and Yépez 2007) emphasize the “feminization” of Ecuadorian emigration. That this is not entirely new is suggested by the earlier *Mujer y Migración* (Borrero and Vega 1995) and also “Género y Migración en la Región Sur” (Herrera and Martínez 2002). On Ecuadorian women in Spain see Wagner 2004.

States in 2000, and the latest available estimate is 400,946 (2006-2008 ACS): 34% above the 2000 figure.

Table 2: Ecuadorian Immigrants in the United States 2006-2008

Area of Residence	Total US	NYC Metro	Queens	Brooklyn	FL	CA
total	400,946	234,800	80,550	21,998	41,475	26,634
male	53%	54%	55%	58%	47%	45%
female	47%	46%	46%	42%	53%	55%
entered 2000 or later	31%	31%	28%	33%	30%	20%
entered 1990 to 1999	32%	34%	36%	31%	27%	19%
entered before 1990	37%	36%	36%	36%	43%	61%
naturalized US citizen	39%	36%	34%	36%	50%	59%
speak English less than very well	65%	72%	76%	77%	54%	47%
high school grad or higher	68%	62%	59%	53%	85%	77%

Source: US Census Bureau ACS (2006-2008)

As Table 2 shows, Ecuadorians are heavily concentrated in the NYC area, with 20% of Ecuadorians in the United States residing in Queens, and almost 60% in the NYC metropolitan area. They are the sixth-largest foreign group and the third-largest Spanish-speaking group in the metro area, after Dominicans (490,812) and Mexicans (304,060). And they are third-largest foreign group in Queens, after Chinese and Guyanese. In 2008, in fact, Ecuador was the first country to open a consulate in Queens.²² As expected, men are more numerous than women, particularly in Queens

²² Commenting on the new consulate for the *New York Times*, the owner of *Ecuador News*—a weekly newspaper based in Queens—said that “having a consular branch in Queens will primarily help immigrants who come from Ecuador’s countryside,” referring to “stories of men who felt so intimidated when they arrived at Grand Central Terminal, on the way to the consulate, on Second Avenue near 42nd Street, that they turned around and took the subway back to Queens” (Santos 2008). The comment exemplifies the almost desperate need for social distinction within the Ecuadorian “community” in Queens. Pribilsky (2007) discusses *Ecuador News* in connection with the “internal differences among Ecuadorian immigrants, differences formed along axes of class, ethnicity, and race (indigenous as opposed to mestizo); regional background (highland versus lowland, urban versus rural); and legal status (documented versus undocumented)” (176-8). Ecuadoreans’ “rise” in New York has also been “haunted by killing,” as the *New York Times* put it reporting on the murder of immigrant José

and Brooklyn. Except for the group in California, who seems to have arrived earlier, Ecuadorians arrived in the United States slightly later than foreigners as a whole (63% versus 57% arrived after 1990). Education level is also roughly comparable with the number for the foreign-born (68% are at least high school graduates, though the percentage drops in Queens and Brooklyn). On the other hand, more Ecuadorians “speak English less than very well” than the total of foreign-born (65% versus 52%, with Ecuadorians in Florida and California—who also tend to be more educated—being the exception).

Whether 400,946 is an adequate estimate of Ecuadorians in the United States is unclear. Based on the official figure for 2005, geographer Brad Jokisch (2007) estimated the actual number between 550,000 and 600,000.²³ The main reason for uncertainty is that an important share of Ecuadorians are in the United States without authorization. Ever since the United States tightened the gates on Latin Americans starting in the late 1960s, Ecuadorians began looking for other options. While tourist visas remained easily obtainable, immigrants would enter legally and overstay their visas. By the 1970s the land route had become an important alternative. Over the years the Ecuadorian human smuggling business matured and expanded—the more

Suczhañay on December 7th, 2008: “As José walked with his older brother Romel home from a bar in Bushwick, Brooklyn, their arms around each other, three men attacked them, shouting anti-gay and anti-Hispanic slurs and beating Mr. Suczhañay with a bat, the police said. He died on Friday night at a Queens hospital, one day before his mother, who had been awaiting for a visa, arrived from Ecuador to see him” (Fahim and Zraick 2008). A month earlier, Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian immigrant who worked at a dry cleaning shop in Patchogue, Long Island, was beaten and stabbed to death when walking down the street: “The police arrested seven teenage boys, who they said had driven into the village from out of town looking for Latinos to beat up” (*New York Times* 2008).

²³ The US Department of State’s “Background Note” on Ecuador (2010) mentions “an estimated one million to two million Ecuadorians living in the United States” (available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35761.htm> [retrieved 07/07/10]). Already in the early 1990s an estimate approaching one million Ecuadorians in the United States was accepted in Ecuador (Astudillo and Cordero 1990: 23); and writer Jorge Enrique Adoum remarked that “it has become commonplace to say that New York City is the third largest Ecuadorian city, with near 400,000 compatriots” (1992: 7). On some of the methodological issues involved in counting “Hispanics” other than Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans in the United States 2000 Census: Logan (2001) and Suro (2002).

restrictive the immigration policy in the United States, the more elaborate the clandestine routes and operations.²⁴

The Department of Homeland Security's latest estimate for unauthorized Ecuadorians in the United States is 170,000, 55% above the 2000 estimate. Table 3 shows that Ecuador is the eighth-largest sender of unauthorized migrants. A comparison between the number of undocumented and the total number of immigrants shows that 42% of Ecuadorians in the United States are unauthorized (a "rate of illegality" only surpassed by Mexico, Central American countries, and Brazil).²⁵ Illegality is central to the Ecuadorian experience in the United States. For those

²⁴ When obtaining a visa to enter legally into Mexico became more difficult, the journey from Ecuador to the United States became considerably longer. People tried to enter Guatemala or other Central American countries, then make it through the Mexican border and travel from there all the way north. David Kyle writes about Ecuadorian migration merchants (Kyle and Liang 2001). In the late 1990s Ecuadorians started to journey to Central America by sea. In 2004 the *New York Times* hired a Cuenca journalist to make the trip in "a creaky old fishing boat overloaded with 205 passengers." The article quotes "immigration and military authorities" stating that "the Ecuadorian sea voyage is one of the least visible and fastest growing in Latin America," and that "In the last four years, at least 250,000 people have left Ecuador on fishing boats" (Thompson and Ochoa 2004). Two journalists wrote books about Ecuadorian sea emigration concentrating on tragic shipwrecks: Boris 2007 and Calderón Vivanco 2007. The table below presents numbers from the United States Coast Guard on the interdiction of Ecuadorians at sea.

Alien Migrant Interdiction by Nationality 2001-2009

Fiscal Year	Haitian	Dominican	PRC	Cuban	Mexican	Ecuadorian	Other	Total
2001	1391	659	53	777	17	1020	31	3948
2002	1486	177	80	666	32	1608	55	4104
2003	2013	1748	15	1555	0	703	34	6068
2004	3229	5014	68	1225	86	1189	88	10899
2005	1850	3612	32	2712	55	1149	45	9455
2006	1198	3011	31	2810	52	693	91	7886
2007	1610	1469	73	2868	26	125	167	6338
2008	1582	688	1	2199	47	220	65	4802
2009	1782	727	35	799	77	6	41	3467

Source: United States Coast Guard (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg531/amio.asp>)

²⁵ This is the case for countries whose unauthorized populations are big enough to be estimated (the Office of Immigration Statistics at the Department of Homeland Security only estimates the ten largest populations). Department of Homeland Security statistics for fiscal years 1999 to 2008 show that 12,386 Ecuadorians were deported from the United States in this period (78% of them were "non-criminals" and 22% "criminals," meaning "persons removed based on a criminal charge or those with a criminal conviction" [DHS 2009]).

arriving after the last regularization program in 1986—Table 2 shows that 63% of Ecuadorians arrived after 1990—there were few possibilities to adjust their immigration legal status. Immigrants in the citizenship class I helped teach in Queens were, of course, legal permanent residents—but most had spent many years without papers before finding a chance to regularize their status.²⁶

Table 3: Unauthorized Population in the United States by Country of Origin 2009

Country	Unauht Imm Pop 09	Total Imm Pop	rate	Unauht Imm Pop 00	00/09
Mexico	6,650,000	11,451,299	0.58	4,680,000	0.42
El Salvador	530,000	1,078,319	0.49	430,000	0.23
Guatemala	480,000	743,786	0.65	290,000	0.66
Honduras	320,000	457,261	0.70	160,000	1.00
Philippines	270,000	1,685,102	0.16	200,000	0.35
Korea	200,000	1,034,719	0.19	180,000	0.11
India	200,000	1,626,906	0.12	120,000	0.67
Ecuador	170,000	407,317	0.42	110,000	0.55
Brazil	150,000	334,534	0.45	100,000	0.50
China	120,000	1,339,131	0.09	190,000	-0.37
All Countries	10,750,000	37,679,592	0.29	8,460,000	0.27

Source: Homeland Security OIS (2009) & US Census Bureau ACS (2006-2008)

Ecuador's population is currently 14.2 million, and approximately 1.5 million or 10% of the population are estimated to live overseas (one third in the United States, one third in Spain, and the rest in other countries). Remittances from Ecuadorians

²⁶ Table 2 shows that 39% of Ecuadorians are naturalized American citizens, roughly the same percentage of pre-1990 arrivals. It is possible to roughly divide Ecuadorians into three groups: 40% are naturalized citizens, 40% are undocumented, and 20% are legal permanent residents. After IRCA in 1986—I still have not been able to find out how many Ecuadorians regularized their status through IRCA—the only path to legalization when having entered without inspection was the 245-I provision, which enabled immigrants to adjust their status through spouses or other sponsors. The last cutoff date for the 245-I provision was April 30th, 2001.

abroad amounted to \$2.8 billion in 2008, almost 10% less than in 2007, but still around 6% of the GDP.²⁷ In spite of increasing immigration from neighboring countries, Ecuador has become an important “sending country,” perhaps an unlikely one given its relatively peaceful history (no civil wars as in Central America, Colombia, or even Perú; no foreign interventions as in the Caribbean). Estimating the country’s population for the 1950-2025 period, the Ecuadorian Census Bureau projected the population loss to stop toward 2015 (Table 4): “Underlying this assumption lies the idea that public policies will be implemented to improve the country’s economic and social conditions and to weaken the causes thwarting the option to stay” (INEC 2003: 18).

Table 4: Estimated Net Migration in Ecuador 1950-2025

net mig	1950-1990	1990-1995	1995-2000	2000-2005	2005-2010	2010-2015	2015-2025
ann mig	0	-10,000	-60,000	-50,000	-24,000	-12,000	0
mig rate	0.00	-0.92	-5.06	-3.92	-1.75	-0.82	0.00

Source: INEC (2003)

The sentence is bureaucratically impersonal and yet moving in its faith in “public policies” to alter the complicated historical processes behind massive emigration.²⁸ As is often the case, Ecuadorian emigration is less about poverty than about the gap between possibilities and expectations. Ecuador’s economic history has been marked by periods of sharp rise and decline associated with unstable export

²⁷ The Banco Central del Ecuador (Ecuadorian Central Bank) keeps track of the remittances. In 2008 47% of the money came from the United States, and 41% from Spain. This was the regional distribution: Austro [Southern Highlands]: 32%; Costa [Coast]: 41%; Sierra [Highlands]: 24%; and Oriente [Amazonia]: 2%. In 2009 remittances were 21% less than in 2008 and 29% less than in 2007. Places like Biblián, in Cañar province, received \$19.5 M in 2009, some \$1500 per habitant (considering the 2001 population for the Biblián parish: 13,309).

²⁸ This is the sentence in Spanish: “Detrás de estos supuestos subyace la idea de que se formularán políticas públicas y se ejecutarán programas y proyectos orientados al gradual mejoramiento de las condiciones económicas y sociales del país y a la atenuación de las causas que truncan significativamente la opción de las personas de permanecer en el país” (INEC 2003: 18).

commodities: cocoa, bananas, and others. Booms set people on the move, and busts left them wondering what is next. The decline of the so-called Panama hats export market in the Southern Highlands is associated with the origins of international emigration from this region. The sudden surge of oil exports in the 1970s led to another boom in Ecuadorian economic history; with oil revenues flooding the treasury, the state apparatus modernized and expanded, and so did an emerging middle class that found opportunities in the new prosperity. When the state finances collapsed in the 1980s, an important segment of recently upwardly mobile Ecuadorians was left wondering what is next.²⁹

While the distinction between the “old” (male and rural) and “new” (female and urban) emigration emphasized in the literature is valid, it makes more sense to encompass both moments in longer-term history. The Ecuadorian restlessness must be understood in light of the country’s cyclical economy, the self-recreating distance between awakened aspirations and ephemeral opportunities. In this view the contrast between the “old” and “new” emigration seems exaggerated. Shifts in the make-up of

²⁹ Carpio (1992: 32) writes about the connection between migration and export booms (cacao, bananas, petroleum). Alberto Acosta’s ([1995] 2001) brief economic history of Ecuador emphasizes the role of export commodities in pushing the country through boom and bust economic cycles. A World Bank (WB) report on “The Current Economic Position and Prospects of Ecuador” in 1973 highlighted the weakness of an economy based on the expansion of agricultural export crops: “Although Ecuador was at one time the largest world exporter of cacao and bananas, the benefits of this growth have been largely concentrated, and the low purchasing power of large segments of the population inhibited the development of a domestic market which would stimulate the growth of manufacturing and the creation of new jobs” (ix). The expansion of oil production, however, at a time when oil prices were on the rise, somehow promised, according to the WB, to make things different: “Ecuador is currently confronted with a great opportunity and challenge to achieve a faster and more balanced economic growth. Higher levels of foreign exchange from petroleum exports should enable the economy to finance higher import levels of intermediate and capital goods and thus achieve much faster rates of growth of output and per capita income than in the past. Substantial tax revenues from petroleum should strengthen public finances, thereby enabling the government to support a high level of current expenditures and an increased public investment program without resorting to excessive borrowing” (ix). The public sector did grow, but the growth was less sustainable than the WB report suggested—there probably was “excessive borrowing.” Like in the rest of Latin America, the increase in the international interest rate in the early 1980s hit the Ecuadorian public finances hard. A conversation with Christian Ponce helped me see how the financial crisis starting in the 1980s created the conditions for so many Ecuadorians of middle-class background—whose livelihood was one way or another dependent on the state—to emigrate. (A recent book by Acosta [2009]—who is also an active politician in Ecuador—draws from the resource curse literature to argue that Ecuador should stop extracting oil from its reserves.)

Ecuadorian emigration can be identified by glancing at the whole, but a closer look reveals that both streams—the older and the newer—include emigrants of varied background: urban and rural, male and female, highlands and coast, relatively poor and relatively “middle-class.” Ecuadorian emigration has been almost as diverse as Ecuador.

It is sometimes said that societies export their differences, and it may be true. But more precisely, as emigrants look to find their position in the new context, the old boundaries and distinctions must be redrawn. Hierarchies do not get easily changed, but neither do they easily stay the same. Emigration is the continuation of social mobility by other means. Upward and downward circulation back home gets intertwined with immigrant trajectories. Like so many other nations, Ecuadorians are divided. Locked in a sort of sociological labyrinth, they are part of an overwhelmingly fragmented and complex society—they are no more a “community” here than they are back home.³⁰

IV. What Follows

The first chapter will present some general ideas about immigrant life. Little if anything will be said about fieldwork in Queens or Ecuadorian emigration. The question I will discuss is why “temporary” migration so often seems to become “permanent.” The answer I will explore is based on the concept of embeddedness, or

³⁰ The labyrinth metaphor to describe Latin American societies was made famous by Mexican Literature Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz’s *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (1950). More relevant in this context, however, is Peruvian social scientist José Guillermo Nugent’s *El Laberinto de la Choleidad* (1992). I quote: “Nuestro espacio no es la llanura de la homegeneización individualista, ni las múltiples, pero inequívocas clasificaciones de la sociedad colonial (aquellos tiempos en que un cuarterón no podía ser confundido con un peninsular ni un criollo con un sacalagua). Resulta entonces que no somos iguales pero tampoco es exacto decir que somos desiguales. ¿Qué sucede?” (17). And then: “La figura del laberinto resulta más apropiada para representar nuestro propio espacio social, nuestro propio discurrir colectivo. En el laberinto el camino es simultáneamente el límite; no hay cómo saber si una pared nos sirve para detenernos o para seguir avanzando por otros rumbos. En el laberinto todos los cambios están entrecruzados y simultáneamente bloqueados, casi” (18).

lack thereof, as developed in economic sociology. The decision to leave is made in dense social spaces. Once emigrants have left, however, social density drops. The emigrant conditions—the effects of distance, the new kinds of jobs, the lack of papers—contribute to clouding up the horizon. Decision-making becomes much more elusive, and return is continually put off.

After chapter one the dissertation is divided into two parts, each part made up of three chapters. The material I present in these six chapters is about two Ecuadorian families living in Queens. On the one hand, the material is biographical, as I reconstruct the social world these families come from in Ecuador, and discuss how this background helps understand their emigrant trajectories. On the other hand, the chapters report on my personal interaction with the emigrants. I was looking for their stories, but their stories were not readily available. It is through participant observation that I was able to build the biographical material: the past was reconstructed from the present, and I was part of the present.

I began this introduction by quoting sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad: there is no real study of emigration without studying the conditions that make it possible to study emigration. This is a high standard, perhaps too high. But as I present the material I try to keep in mind that my interaction with the people I am writing about was conditioned by who I am—sometimes it was made easier, sometimes more difficult, sometimes just different. Participant observation, in this sense, may be nothing but the tension between the researcher as participant and observer. The position I occupied, the way I conducted myself, the way I was seen, were all central to shaping my collection and presentation of the material.

The first family I study (chapters two through four) is from Guayaquil, on the coast. The second family (chapters five through seven) is from the city of Cuenca, in the Southern highlands, though one of the family members I write about is from Quito.

The two families have very different backgrounds, but both can be said to be of urban origin (at least at the time of leaving for the United States). Combined, these histories encapsulate the central elements I found throughout my interaction with many Ecuadorians of urban origin. As anticipated above, most of the literature on Ecuadorians in the United States concentrates on immigrants of rural background. As I showed in the previous section, there are demographic reasons why urban migrants should also be studied: 65% of 1996-2001 Ecuadorian emigrants came from urban areas. And it is no coincidence that I focused on them.

One night I was drinking with Mauro Noboa, next morning I was helping Macario Correa practice writing. A product of the Latin American urban middle class myself, it is no (sociological) wonder that I could connect more easily with emigrants of urban origin—urban, once again, meaning more than urban. This is not to say that I could identify with Mauro. I was always aware of how different our background was. And it is also not to say that the time I spent with Macario—I was several times at his house and was invited to his grandson's baptism party—was not one of the most intense in my fieldwork. One way or another it is clear to me that when talking to Mauro, or even with old Guayaquilean José Torre, I could feel an immediacy—a grasp of the language—that I could not easily feel with Macario or other migrants from the rural highlands I was lucky to meet.

And yet this connection is as clear as it is unclear. Our countries of origin are different, and much more so were our personal backgrounds. What we might have in common is our remote participation in the project vaguely known as the Latin American middle class. A series of attitudes, a collection of plans, a set of clichés, an unsustainable pride and lots of nostalgia, the Latin American middle class varies by country and region; and yet it shares the lines of its sociological contour: the vital association with the state, the language of politics, a weak basis of economic support.

And it shares the marks of its recent historical experience: the expansion in the 1960s and 1970s, the decline starting in the 1980s, the near collapse in the last two decades. I might have connected with some of these emigrants because, at least to some limited extent, I could listen to them talk about their vanishing social world as if it had been mine.

One of the most famous Ecuadorian novels narrates several months in the life of a character named Luis Alfonso Romero y Flores, known as “El Chulla” (the novel is called *El Chulla Romero y Flores*, written by Jorge Icaza and published in 1958). Chulla is a Quechua word meaning one out of two, uneven, or incomplete. The word is used for someone who is part-white and part-Indian, mestizo, but also more generally to indicate that he is positioned unclearly, somewhere in the middle: neither white nor Indian, certainly not rich but neither entirely poor (or poor, actually, but neither a peasant nor a manual worker, and aspiring and pretending to be much more). The novel displays the stifling language of highly stratified Ecuadorian society, but also the dynamism of incipient social mobility, embodied by the schemes of Romero y Flores to find ways through and around the more established classes.

Emigration is absent in the book—except for one of the obscure employees at the obscure public office where Romero y Flores works, the character of Gabriel Montoya, mentioned in passing but ultimately consequential, whose “archive of crazy adventures” included: tango singer in Buenos Aires, dishwasher in New York, comedian in Central America, smuggler in Cuba, and bullfighter in Spain ([1958] 1996: 73-4). The inclusion of “dishwasher in New York” along the other more adventure-like adventures does not surprise. Yet it is difficult to imagine that today—five decades and many thousands of emigrants later—someone’s “archive of crazy adventures” could include what has become an almost regular option for Ecuadorians

from all backgrounds to cope with a shrinking society. (Difficult but not impossible: the perception of emigrant life still differs widely from emigrant life.)

Historian Fernand Braudel's only reference to Ecuador in *A History of Civilizations* is based on another and better-known novel by Icaza, *Huasipungo* (published in 1934 and translated into English in 1962). Braudel quotes *Huasipungo* and other novels to point out, characteristically, the weakness of the Latin American middle class, and the need for stronger middle classes if politics and the economy are to be more stable. When mentioning Ecuador, Braudel writes: "On the map, it looks small. In fact, it is bigger than Italy: with the Galapagos Islands, it covers 123,000 square miles. In 1962, it had only 2 million inhabitants, and had offered to take a further million immigrants; twenty years later, its population was over 9 million" ([1987] 1995: 435). Almost thirty years later, the population is 14 million, and the country has attracted some immigrants—but 10% of Ecuadorians, from small villages and from large cities, now live somewhere else.

CHAPTER ONE:
AS IT BEGINS TO LAST TOO LONG

On the street where I lived in Queens, near the 46th Street stop of the No. 7 train in Sunnyside, an advertising sign for Delta Airlines read in Portuguese: “Que ironia, agora você tem mais destinos do que nunca, porém menos feriados [What an irony, now you have more destinations than ever, but fewer holidays].” A few days later I saw the same ad in *El Diario/La Prensa*, the main Spanish-language newspaper in New York City, this time written in Spanish and with an attractive full-color beach photograph in the background.

Alluding to the supposedly high number of holidays in Latin American countries, the ad contrasted life in the United States and back home. Now you have more destinations than ever, Delta told immigrants, but fewer holidays. Now you can travel anywhere you want, but cannot take as many days off. By contrasting “more destinations than ever” with “fewer holidays,” the ad highlighted a contradiction in the immigrant experience: now that traveling has become easier, it has also become more difficult.

Also in NYC Spanish-language newspapers during my time in Queens, Hipotecaria Nacional, Mexico’s largest mortgage lender, ran an advertising campaign promoting loans to buy houses in Mexico. One of the ads pictured a proud-looking Mexican man on a spirited horse, dressed in traditional clothing, the Mexican flag in his hand, the Brooklyn Bridge and the Manhattan skyline in the background. Below it read: “Aunque sabemos que estás afuera, para nosotros sigues siendo el rey [Although we know you’re abroad, for us you’re still the king].”

The company sought to touch a sensitive nerve among immigrants: the fear of not being remembered. You are still important, the ad reassured Mexicans in NYC,

you are “still the king.” Yet by connecting the migrant’s kingdom with the sending of money to buy property, the ad suggested something else: it is not *although* but *because* “you’re abroad” that “you’re still the king.” Your family still remembers you, the company seemed to say, but memory—your kingdom—is now tied to the money you send.

Both ads seek to step into immigrants’ shoes, speaking their language and empathizing with the dual nature of migration: the mixed feelings, the gains and losses, the contradictions. The Delta ad underlines the clash between migrants’ new possibilities and new limitations. The mortgage ad targets the tension between memory and oblivion, not too subtly pointing to remittances as one way of keeping alive the migrant’s “kingdom” back home.³¹

Casual and humorous as the companies intend them to be, the ads express contrasts that are central to the immigrant experience. What is the point of working so hard and making more money if you are too busy or tired to enjoy it? How is it possible that leaving your family is the only way to help them? What does it take for the people back home not to forget you, or, more bluntly, how much does it cost? And more generally: How do immigrant lives compare to immigrant plans? How do immigrants reconcile the adventurous and heroic side of migration—the handsome Mexican rider pictured in the ad—with the repetitive and demeaning nature of most immigrant jobs?

³¹ More can be said about these ads. The Delta ad expresses the tension between the immigrant as worker and the immigrant as consumer (the immigrant press often struggles to bring together the image of the immigrant as exploited worker, on the one hand, and the image of the immigrant as successful consumer, on the other). The mortgage ad refers to the Mexican song “El Rey [The King],” sung by Vicente Fernández, which states that “with or *without* money I’m still the king” (I thank Victoria Quiroz Becerra for explaining this to me). Also, the ad implies that the kingdom is not merely domestic: by having migrants wave the national flag, the company appoints them as national “ambassadors,” seeking to reinforce the “affective” ties back home. Finally, the picture of the Mexican rider conveys hubris and manhood, standing in sharp contrast with the migrants’ daily routine. The two ads say one thing and mean the opposite. The Delta ad says that now you cannot travel, but Delta certainly hopes you do. The mortgage ad says that people in Mexico still care for you and that you care for them, but also that sending money is necessary for the bonds to withstand the distance.

Starting its ad by mentioning “irony,” Delta suggests that immigrants may simply laugh at the twists and turns in their lives. A Spanish street ad for Nesquik in Queens told this old children’s joke: “What did a jaguar say to another jaguar? Jaguar You”—“Jaguar You” sounding just like “How Are You” when pronounced in Spanish. Silly as it sounds, the joke takes on an edge in immigrant Queens, calling to mind another immigrant contrast: to live and work in a country where you do not speak the language. By mixing Spanish and English, Nesquik made fun of the language barrier, easily engaging its immigrant customers.³²

Similarly, and because Spanish has the same word—sueño—for “sleepiness” and “dream,” I heard a Colombian stand-up comic in Queens quipping that the American “dream” (in Spanish the same as “sleepiness”) is the one you get coming home after working a 16-hour shift.

Immigrants, or some immigrants, may laugh off their often contradictory fate. But what does irony hide? This chapter proceeds as follows. Drawing on work by sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad, I claim that the contradictions in immigrant life stem from the tension between “temporary” and “permanent” migration (section I). I review the problem of time-orientation in the literature on immigration to the United States (section II), and I discuss economist Michael Piore’s approach to short-term migration (section III). Next I ask why and how “temporary” migration can become “permanent” (section IV); and then I argue for socio-biographical methodology as the best suited to understand this process (section V). I finish by setting the stage for the empirical material I present in the dissertation (section VI).

³² Growing up in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in the 1950s, my mother remembers the joke in slightly different form. Question: “How are you?” (in not-too-good English pronunciation sounding like “Are you a jaguar?”). Answer: “No – I’m sorry” (in not-too-good English pronunciation sounding like “No – I’m a fox”). The joke belongs somewhere in between Spanish and English; it does not target bilingual speakers but Spanish speakers struggling with learning English.

I. The Temporary That Lasts

What is the difference between an emigrant and an immigrant? The emigrant leaves, the immigrant arrives. Between departure and arrival, at some point along the way, emigrants become immigrants. How so? What changes, of course, is the angle from which they are watched. For those staying in the country of origin, they are emigrants; for those in the country of destination, immigrants. Is that all the difference between the two?

The word “migrant” offers an alternative. “Emigrant” and “immigrant” suggest permanence. “Migrant,” unlike “emigrant,” suggests that the migrant has *not* left for good; unlike “immigrant,” it suggests that the migrant is *not* here to stay. The word seems to say less than either “emigrant” or “immigrant,” but perhaps it says more. “Migrant” entails circularity, anticipating an outcome—emigrants who return, immigrants who do not stay—that cannot be anticipated; and somehow it downplays the two facts that we do know: an emigrant has left and an immigrant has arrived.

Because most research on emigration is conducted from the perspective of the receiving countries, “immigrant” is the most common word. The word “immigrant,” in fact, originated in the United States to address nineteenth-century emigration.³³

“Migrant” is also used, however, and is somewhat interchangeable with “immigrant.” Either one makes it easy to forget that immigrants (or migrants) are also emigrants.

³³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “immigrant” as “One who or that which immigrates; a person who migrates into a country as a settler.” This is the first use it mentions: “**1792 J. BELKNAP** *Hist. New Hampsh.* III. Pref. 6 There is another deviation from the strict letter of the English dictionaries which is found extremely convenient in our discourses on population . . . The verb *immigrate* and the nouns *immigrant* and *immigration* are used without scruple in some parts of this volume. *Ibid.* III. 473.” And this is the second: “**1809 KENDALL** *Trav.* II. lv. 252 *Immigrant* is perhaps the only new word, of which the circumstances of the United States has in any degree demanded the addition to the English language.” Historian Frank Thistlethwaite mentions an earlier use: “The term ‘immigrant’ is said to have been coined in 1789 by Samuel Morse as an Americanism essential to describe someone whom language had hitherto universally described as an ‘emigrant’” ([1960] 1991: 19). Historian Marcus Lee Hansen writes: “The first use of the word ‘immigrant’ seems to date from 1817. The process of immigration was then two hundred years old, but during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the settler was known as an ‘emigrant.’ HE migrated *out* of something; by 1817 he was migrating *into* something” ([1940] 1942: 11).

The work by Abdelmalek Sayad (2004) shows why the distinction matters. The dual identity of emigrants/immigrants, Sayad argues convincingly, is the key to unraveling the contradictions in emigrant (immigrant) life.³⁴

To be both an immigrant and an emigrant means to be both present and absent: physically present but “spiritually” absent in the country of immigration, and physically absent but “spiritually” present in the country of emigration. “The condition or paradox of the emigrant,” Sayad writes, “is that he goes on being present despite his absence . . . while he is (partially) absent where and when he is present” (124-5). The migrant’s presence and absence, then, are never complete: emigrants are never completely gone, immigrants never completely arrive.

Partly “here” and partly “there,” emigrants (immigrants) tend to frame their experience in contrasting terms. “Here” is the place to make money; “there” is the place to enjoy the money. “Here” is the place of work; “there” is the place of everything else: family, status, belonging, language. The emigrant/immigrant condition is much about detaching work from life: work “here,” live “there.” Both present and absent, migrants oscillate between two poles, all the way from an unlikely ubiquitousness to variations of Sayad’s “double absence” (as his book was titled in the original French).

Migration can be seen as an effort to keep the two spaces apart; “here” and “there” must not get mixed up. But how long can it last? Emigration/immigration is conceived with an end in sight. Migrants split their life in two, but they know it will not last long. They focus exclusively on work but know that after one, two, three years they will have saved enough money to go back. Migration is imagined as some sort of

³⁴ Bourdieu and Wacquant (2000) refer to Abdelmalek Sayad as “the organic ethnologist of Algerian migration” and present some of his main ideas. Sayad’s *La double absence: Des illusions de l’émigré aux souffrances de l’immigré* was published in France in 1999 and translated into English as *The Suffering of the Immigrant* in 2004. Sayad had died in 1998. The book is based on articles by Sayad and was put together and prefaced by Pierre Bourdieu.

parenthesis, an interruption or deviation from mainstream life, a shortcut, perhaps. The stay in the new country is defined as temporary; the future awaits back home.

Yet, as time goes by, the initial plan tends to get blurry. As migrants stay longer than expected, their relative absence back home threatens to become an absolute absence; and their temporary work threatens to become their life. The original plan must be adjusted: return must be postponed, once and again. By sticking to the plan of return, immigrants can bear all that is unbearable in immigrant life. In the same way as “here” (work) and “there” (life) must be kept apart, so do present and future. “Here” only makes sense because there is “there”; the present makes sense because there is future. Only by thinking about returning do immigrants (emigrants) manage to stay.

Herein lies the “contradiction in the temporal order” described by Sayad: immigration (emigration) is “something ‘temporary’ that becomes permanent,” and “something ‘permanent’ that is experienced as though it were temporary” (124-5). As one year dissolves into the next, “temporary” emigrants become “permanent” emigrants. But they refuse to see it. By renewing the plan of return, by hiding the lasting nature of their “temporary” experience, migrants slide away from their original intent, without ever confronting the change.

Migrants? Emigrants? Immigrants? None of these terms seems to work because they all pretend we know more than we do about the “migrant’s” orientation to time. It could be that these are actually types: migrants, emigrants, immigrants. Or perhaps stages: most start off as migrants, then some become emigrants and immigrants. To render them mutually exclusive, however, takes away the ambiguity from them; it veils the ongoing tension between the “temporary” and the “permanent”; it masks the slippery texture of immigrant time.

Junot Díaz writes in one of his stories about Dominicans in New York City: “It was a cold winter and he didn’t have much of a coat. Nobody bought coats then, Papi told me, because nobody was expecting to stay that long” (1996: 185-6). Migrants do not expect migration to be painless, but they often expect it to be short. Immigrant time is flexible, though, and “temporary” and “permanent” become difficult to tell apart. The contradictory feeling of the “temporary that lasts” frames the entire migration experience, Sayad writes (2004: 58). One of his interviewees sums it up: “Tomorrow—he will go back tomorrow . . . That’s the emigrant for you: it’s always later, afterwards, and then” (59).

II. Migrants Looking Back

Sometimes phrased as sojourn versus settlement, or labor versus family immigration, the question of temporary versus permanent migration runs through the scholarly literature on immigration, although not often explicitly. This section briefly reviews how the time-orientation of immigrants has been approached in the United States. First I look at some classics in the study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European immigration and then I move to studies of immigration today.

Migration as Modern Sacrifice

Even as it was part of the “Americanization studies” of the early 1920s, W.I. Thomas’s *Old World Traits Transplanted* (1921) acknowledged that not all immigrants planned to stay.³⁵ The book presents an interesting typology dividing

³⁵ In the wake of one of the few famous scandals in the history of sociology, *Old World Traits Transplanted* had to be formally authored by Thomas’s colleagues Robert Park and Herbert Miller. It was not until 1971—fifty years after the original publication—that the book was published under Thomas’s name (although in 1951 Thomas’s authorship was acknowledged [Young 1971]). “W.I. Thomas’ connection with the University of Chicago ended abruptly in 1918, shortly after he was arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigations on a charge involving alleged violation of the Mann Act [prohibiting “interstate transport of females for immoral purposes”] and of an act forbidding false hotel registration. These charges were thrown out of court, but there had been extensive publicity

immigrants into six types: 1) the settler, 2) the colonist, 3) the political idealist, 4) the allrightnick, 5) the *caffone*, and 6) the intellectual. The first two types—the settler and the colonist—specifically concern the immigrants’ time-frame, but both the “allrightnick” and the “caffone” have their own and distinctive orientation to time.³⁶

The settler has either set out with “a resolve to break with the past permanently” or become a settler along the way, “perhaps after a series of hardships here” (1921: 83).³⁷ The colonist is “one who never forgets nor wishes to forget, whose allegiance is to the home country, whose superior values are the home values” (93). The documents presented to illustrate the colonist type come from the “Sicilians from

because Mrs. Granger, who was involved in the proceedings, reported that she was the wife of an army officer in the United States Expeditionary Forces in France. The circumstances surrounding the intervention of federal agents in this case remain unclear. Thomas’ wife was active in Henry Ford’s peace movement, and her activities had apparently come under official surveillance. It has been asserted that the action against Thomas supplied means for embarrassing and discrediting Mrs. Thomas because of her political activities” (Janowitz 1966: xiv). Thomas was dismissed from the University of Chicago: “The hostility of the administration toward W.I. Thomas as a person and his controversial outlook speeded the process, but most university personnel did not view it as extraordinary that he should be dismissed” (xv). Thomas was 55 years old at the time. Abbott and Egloff (2008) write about Thomas: “His spectacular departure from Chicago in April 1918 made him a somewhat mythical figure to generations of sociologists: a famous colleague without an academic position, a path-breaking scholar who was a bon-vivant, a collector of data who left no papers, a restless intellectual who played golf daily” (218). Anthropologist Franz Boas reviewed *Old World Traits Transplanted* in the *New York Times* on February 6th, 1921.

³⁶ The “allrightnick” is the term applied by the “Jews of the New York East Side” to “successful members of their race who have found a comfortable berth outside the Jewish community and within the cosmopolitan group of ‘Americanized’ Americans.” Thomas also uses the term to characterize “an opportunistic type which is not peculiar to the Jewish race—namely, the individual who realizes a very natural ambition to gain access to and some sort of recognition, or at least toleration, in the native American community, or what passes for it, but who does so at the sacrifice of the ideals of his own national and family group” (101-2). The “caffone” (literally, says Thomas, “simpleton”) is the term that Italians apply to a man of their nationality “who has the least possible association with any group, has no regard for opinion, wears, for example, the same clothes during his whole stay in America, avoids all conversation, ignores his surroundings, and accumulates the sum of money he has in mind as rapidly as possible” (103-4).

³⁷ Thomas writes about the settler: “All emigration represents some crisis in the life of emigrants. The decision to leave home is usually precipitated by some incident of immediate significance, probably one destroying the economic basis of life—as where the hereditary land fails to support a growing family, or the property of a Jew is destroyed by a *pogrom*” (1921: 83). And he continues: “The typical settler has been accustomed to a severe limitation of the wishes in the home country and relative hardship here is considered success. But in the first generation of immigrants this success is never felt as complete. The economic success may be complete, from any standpoint, but there are sentimental losses” (92-3). Thomas mentions three subtypes within the settler type: the pioneer, the political refugee, and the fugitive from justice (91).

Sixty Ninth Street,” most of whom intend to return to their village (95); and from immigrants in the Polish-American circles about whom Florian Znaniecki reported: “At this moment, I have not met a single person belonging to this circle who did not talk about returning home in the near future; some have been here for fifteen years” (quoted in Thomas 1921: 96).

Five years later, Harry Jerome’s (1926) report on *Migration and Business Cycles* abounds in references to migrants moving back and forth across the Atlantic. The study establishes that both seasonal and non-seasonal fluctuations in employment are correlated with net migration. Beneath the massive transplantation of Europeans to America, Jerome shows myriad movements in both ways, reflecting not only varying conditions but also the migrants’ indecision as to where to live.³⁸

Seen both in the settler who did not plan to settle and in the colonist’s longing for return, the short-time orientation of immigrants is present in *Old World*, though seldom as dominant theme. Along with Jerome’s well-documented actual returns, Thomas’s typology hints at the tension between temporary and permanent migration—the mental if not always physical restlessness, the imaginary back and forth. Little of this flux survived in the literature after the near shutdown of European immigration to the United States in the early 1920s.³⁹ As immigration became history, the tension

³⁸ In trying to sort out the statistics, Jerome faces the gap between intention and reality: “In some instances the term *permanent* has been used for immigrants and emigrants and *temporary* for the nonimmigrants and nonemigrants [alien arrivals and departures minus immigrants and emigrants]; but these terms should not be interpreted too literally, as the classification is based upon declared intention, and intentions may be either misstated or subsequently changed” (1926: 31). Jerome makes it clear that the correlation between migration and seasonal and business cycles held *before* the enactment of restrictive immigration policy in the early 1920s. Towards the end of the book he writes: “However, after the introduction of the quota principle of restriction, with provisions which tend to modify the seasonal movement in immigration, it would appear that although the flow of immigrants is reduced in volume its distribution by months is now less likely than formerly to be well adjusted to the seasonal variations in employment” (243). This is not different from Douglas Massey’s (2006) discussion of the unintended consequences of tougher border enforcement today: finding it more difficult to get in and out, immigrants stay longer, and are forced to move from seasonal jobs to full-year jobs.

³⁹ There are important exceptions, such as the work by Chicago sociologist Paul C. P. Siu in the 1950s. “You promised to go abroad for only three years,” Siu quotes the wife of a Chinese laundryman in a letter to her husband, “but you have stayed there nearly thirty years now!” (1952: 36). Siu writes about “The Sojourner” as a deviant type from Simmel’s “stranger,” and not so different from Thomas’s

between temporary and permanent migration gave way to more stylized interpretative types.

Drafted in the early 1950s, historian Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* ([1951] 1973) is perhaps the most influential synthesis of the European emigration experience. Describing one of the "bleaker pages" of American history, Handlin's portrayal of emigration tracks the painful effects of the transfer upon the peasants leaving Europe for the United States in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century (4). *The Uprooted* studies the suffering of the immigrants, torn away from their homeland and bewildered as they saw everything they counted on slip away.⁴⁰

No matter how bad things were, however, Handlin's emigrants never think of going back to Europe. Even wondering whether "a man [can ever] feel really happy condemned to live away from where he was born," even hoping to still belong to his homeland, he has "cut himself off and knows he will never return" (232). Handlin's immigrants live in two different places: the idealized homeland of which they dream,

"colonist": "The essential characteristic of the sojourner is that he clings to the culture of his own ethnic group as in contrast to the bicultural complex of [Robert Park's] marginal man"—this is the case of "a large number of immigrants in America" (34). The "intrinsic purpose of the sojourn is to do a job and do it in the shortest possible time. The sojourner seldom organizes his life beyond the accomplishing of this end." Siu makes a contrast between job and career: "The sojourner may not necessarily like his job and enjoy working at it. It is rather that he is fighting for social status at home." And Siu continues: "Although the sojourner plans to get through with the job in the shortest possible time, yet he soon finds himself in a dilemma as to whether to stay abroad or return home" (35). Siu's dissertation, written in Chicago under Ernest Burgess and Louis Wirth in the 1950s, was not published in book form until 1988.

⁴⁰ Based on a vast array of sources, Handlin reconstructs intimate moments in which emigrants wonder and meditate about their life. "Often they would try to understand. They would think about it in the pauses of their work, speculate sometimes as their minds wandered, tired, at the close of the day" ([1951] 1973: 85). Sometimes, however, as in the theater, they would just laugh: "Why then, they who laugh are looking into a great eccentric mirror. They see themselves—but all out of shape, grotesque, unhuman. They hold their sides as the teetering homunculi, pummeled down, bounce merrily up again. *Our family name is Carey, so happy, light, and airy, we came from Tipperary so far across the sea. So far across the sea, my boys, and now? We've struck a job so handy. So handy? That's dandy; you're dandies. Yes, with the shovel we're the dandies*" (164). Handlin adds: "This is the language of irony. To those whom experience gives understanding the meaning is clear. All this buffoonery exaggerates but slightly the real features of this slapstick life of theirs. Does not the whole migration have a bitter, contradictory outcome as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things? It is all true, the tripping and trapping, the falling and brawling, the beating and cheating. Too true for tragedy! Only laughter draws the sting of it" (165).

the harsh America in which they toil. Yet they do not perceive migration as temporary: their hopes are not back home.⁴¹

In spite of Handlin's powerful type, historical research shows that from 1880 to 1930 between one quarter and one third of immigrants did return to Europe.⁴² Citing the lack of attention to return migration among historians and other social scientists, historian Mark Wyman echoes fellow historian Frank Thistlethwaite ([1960] 1991) and complains: "Returned immigrants rejected America and, it seems, American scholars have rejected them" (Wyman 1993: 4).

The Uprooted ignored return migration because it did not fit its understanding of emigration. The book follows an interpretative arch that admits little or no room to go back.⁴³ Already present in *Old World* and other Chicago-era studies of immigration, *The Uprooted* deepens an interpretation of the migrant experience that mirrors the experience of modern life as approached in classical sociology.⁴⁴ In an

⁴¹ The emigrants' hope, in Handlin's view, is in their children, for whom they sacrifice. The "wry irony" of the migrants' relationship with their offspring, however, is that the children reject their parents' sacrifice ([1951] 1973: 229). The "immigrants learned that to be willing to sacrifice was not enough, that their children must be also willing to accept the sacrifice; and of that there could be no confidence" (217). "What dreams they had had were dreams of the family transplanted, that generation after generation would bear witness to the achievements of migration" (229). But "Whatever lot their sons had drawn in this new contentious world, the family's oneness would not survive it. It was a sad satisfaction to watch the young advance, knowing that every step forward was a step away from home" (230).

⁴² Thistlethwaite writes: "it is estimated that perhaps a third of United States immigrants re-emigrated" ([1960] 1991: 24). The rates of return have been recorded by national group for 1908-23, with one of the highest rates for "Southern Italians" at 60% and the lowest for "Hebrews" at 5% (Wyman 1993: 11). Drawing on work by other scholars, Wyman distinguishes between "emigration 'because' and emigration 'in order to'"; and he explains that the second group became more important toward the end of the nineteenth century, "stimulated by a changing American economy and the increasing ease—psychological as well as physical—of the transatlantic journey." Wyman concludes: "[As] emigration 'in order to' became more popular, short-term emigration to the United States entered its boom years" (17).

⁴³ In an article published a few years after *The Uprooted* and titled "Immigrants Who Go Back," Handlin (1956) implicitly seeks to make up for neglecting the returnees. But the article, short and published in *The Atlantic* magazine, is very different from the approach in *The Uprooted*. In the casual style of travel-writing, Handlin reports on returnees he met while traveling in Europe. There is nothing of the heavy historical interpretation that defines his major work. Handlin recognizes that some immigrants went back, but does not attempt to make sense of it historically.

⁴⁴ Discussing his sources in the final chapter, Handlin ([1951] 1973) acknowledges the influence of classical sociology: "The common hope of historians that others would absolve them of the necessity for original thought had already led me through MacIver, Marx, Durkheim, Sombart, Weber,

article on “Migration and the Marginal Man,” for instance, Robert Park follows Simmel’s “The Stranger” to describe the migrant in now classical sociological terms: “The effect of mobility and migration is to secularize relations which were formerly sacred. One may describe the process, in its dual aspect, perhaps, as the secularization of society and the individuation of the person” ([1928] 1980: 242). The migrant is “free for new adventures, but he is more or less without direction and control” (241).

As they moved from one continent to another, migrants often left the countryside for the cities, switching from self-employment in agriculture to wage-labor industrial jobs. Handlin’s type, then, involves a theory of transition from the old to the new world: the breakdown of the primary group, the disintegration of the traditional peasant world. The themes of loneliness and alienation run through the book, as do the commercialization of the economy (“in America every crumb was paid for” [Handlin 1979 [1951]: 73]) and the instrumentalization of social life. Handlin’s emigrant, in one word, embodies the process of modernization as painted in classical sociology. If he cannot go back to Europe, it is because history cannot go back.

Towards the end of the book, Handlin reconstructs an imaginary conversation between an emigrant father and his American son. The disappointed father would like to ask his son what the point of emigrating has been: “Though a rest may come, end

Mannheim, and Pareto; and I had at the time of writing enlisted in an experiment to create a new, unified department at Harvard. The senior members were Talcott Parsons, Gordon Allport, and Pitrim Sorokin. My assignment, to compile a canon of social science classics (i.e., books written before 1920), forced me to review a large and stimulating body of theory in the areas the nascent Department of Social Relations took its province” (302-3). Maldwyn Jones (1969) puts *The Uprooted* in context and emphasizes the connections between the book and Chicago-era sociology. Richard Hofstadter, reviewing the book for *Partisan Review* in 1952, was the first to suggest that *The Uprooted* should be read as an ideal type, which Handlin himself approved of ([1951] 1973: 304). Rudolph Vecoli (1964) criticized Handlin for the same reason, arguing that the author had “subordinated historical complexity to the symmetrical pattern of sociological theory” (quoted in Jones 1969: 256-7). Historian Frank Thistlethwaite ([1960] 1991) writes that the “Handlin achievement represents a blending of the historical and the sociological approaches of immense value to the study of migration” (18).

all these struggles, what shall I have gained thereby?” (270).⁴⁵ The son does not know “how to speak” the answer. But in the “meaning of his father’s life,” writes Handlin, “was the meaning of America” (271).⁴⁶ The book’s famous first line—“immigrants *were* American history” (4)—does not refer so much to the contribution of immigrants to the American population; it is about the experiential affinities between migration and America: “The newcomers were on the way to becoming Americans almost before they stepped off the boat, because their own experience of displacement had already introduced them to what was essential in the situation of Americans” (271-2).

Tocqueville captured the affinity between emigration and “America” when writing about the westward movement in the United States—several decades before massive European immigration.⁴⁷ “It would be difficult to describe the avidity with

⁴⁵ Thistlethwaite writes that “there are few [scholars] with the detachment to ask the question posed of immigrants long ago by Foerster [1919]: ‘Has the game for them been worth the candle?’” ([1960] 1991: 19).

⁴⁶ This is the answer to his father’s unasked question that the son does not know how to speak: “No, you may long for it, but you will not take the steps to lead you back; the nest abandoned will never see its brood again. And what is this security of which you dream? Its warmth is that of many bodies crowded into a small space; its order is that of rigid constriction that leaves no room for action; its safety is that of the binding fetter. The security of the nest is a huddled restraint. No, the blow that tossed you out, that forever snapped the ancient ties, that blow was an act of liberation. You long of course for the safety, you cherish still the ideals of the nest. But danger and insecurity are other words for freedom and opportunity. You are alone in a society without order; you miss the support of the community, the assuredness of a defined rank. But you are also quit of traditional obligations, of the confinement of a given station. This is no less a liberation because you arrived at it not through joyful striving but through a cataclysmic plunge into the unknown, because it was not welcome but thrust upon you” ([1951] 1973: 270-1). Handlin refers to his own Russian immigrant father (“an audience of one”) in the last page of the book (322).

⁴⁷ Tocqueville refers to immigration in the United States at several points in *Democracy in America* ([1835] 2004). For one thing, there is the footnote about the American largest cities, Philadelphia and New York: “The lower classes in these vast cities constitute a rabble even more dangerous than that of Europe. It consists primarily of freed Negroes condemned by law and opinion to a state of hereditary degradation and misery. In its midst one also finds hordes of Europeans driven to the shores of the New World every day by misfortune and mischief. These people bring our worst vices with them to the United States, and they have none of the interests that could combat the influence of those vices. As residents of the country but not citizens, they are quick to take advantage of all the passions simmering within it” (320-1). A few pages later, however, Tocqueville writes: “Thus European immigrants still arrive in a country that is only half full, where industry is hungry for labor. The newcomer becomes a prosperous worker. His son goes off to seek fortune in an empty land and becomes a wealthy landowner. The former amasses capital that the latter uses to good advantage, and neither the foreigner nor the native lives in misery” (324-5). The dual vision of immigration—the “hordes of Europeans” and the “prosperous worker”—runs through American history. Commenting on Emma Lazarus’s renowned poem, historian John Higham writes: “[Her] image of the immigrants as ‘tempest-tost’ and yearning to

which the American hurls himself upon the immense prey that fortune offers him,” Tocqueville begins. “These people left their original homeland in search of a good life. They left their second homeland in search of a still better one.” Yet almost everywhere they go, Tocqueville continues, “they encounter good fortune but not happiness.” The “desire for well-being has become an anxious, burning passion than grows even as it is satisfied.” Americans moving westward “long ago broke the bonds that attached them to their native soil and have formed no other bonds since” ([1835] 2004: 326).

Many immigrants did go back to Europe and it is possible that many more planned to do so. But in Handlin’s influential ideal type the experience of migration represents the experience of modernity; migration is one-way because history is one-way. If immigrants were America, and America cannot be unmade, how to make sense of return? *The Uprooted*, like many immigrant stories, is rife with suffering. But there is no going back. On the altar of the future, immigration is seen as a form of modern sacrifice.⁴⁸

breathe free reflected one aspect of the spirit of her age; her picture of them as wretched refuse mirrored another. And the two were not incompatible. They dwelt together in poetry and in public opinion. From one point of view the immigrants symbolized the force of freedom pulling men through a golden door. From another they looked poor and huddled and unattractive” ([1955] 1994: 23-4).

⁴⁸ The difficulty in discussing the desire to return is common in the literature, even in the absence of Handlin’s broad historical interpretation. In his study of Italian-Americans, for instance, Richard Alba (1985) explains that Italians were not interested in farming because “Many [of them] came intending to earn money as quickly as possible and then return to Italy to purchase their own land” (47). The “intention of return” is cited to explain why immigrants chose one area of the economy over another, but little more is said about it: “[By] the end of the 1920s, many of those who intended to come only temporarily had returned to Italy, and others had mentally transferred their futures from the Mezzogiorno to America” (54). The change of orientation is not discussed in the book. Roger Daniels’s well-known review of the immigrant experience from colonial times to the present (1990) takes a similar approach: “These Italian immigrants were heavily male—males outnumbered females three to one—and were quite likely to return. Perhaps a majority of all the Italians who came here never intended to stay. What is important is not that fact, but that so many *did* stay” (194-5). Important or not, the author does not see the need to explain it. A review of “the immigrant” in United States history reads: “The immigrant, then, was treated as a member of a lost generation, whose plight can in no way be seen as mitigating the powerful assimilative forces at work in America” (Kivisto 1990: 467).

New Immigrant Time

European immigration was from the “old” to the “new” world; migrants were moving from the past to the future. Current immigration comes from the third world to the first one, or from so-called developing countries to more developed ones. Modernization is still part of the migration narrative, but less clearly than in the past. Because there is less sense of direction, migration might be seen as more open-ended or easily reversed. How is the immigrants’ orientation to time treated in the literature on current immigration?

No simile to *Old World* has yet been written for the wave of immigration starting in the late 1960s, but *Immigrant America* by Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut (1996) comes relatively close. Like its predecessor eighty years earlier, *Immigrant America* surveys the variety and complexity of immigration, also offering several types. The typology in *Immigrant America* revolves around four major groups: 1) labor migrants; 2) professional immigrants; 3) entrepreneurial immigrants; and 4) refugees and asylees.

At first sight there seems to be no distinction regarding the temporal orientation of migrants: nothing similar to the distinction between “the settler” and “the colonist” in *Old World*. But the “labor migrants” category includes two subtypes: “Some [labor migrants] do stay and attempt to carve a new life in America. Many return, however, because although U.S. wages are higher, the yield of these wages in terms of consumption, investments, and social status is often greater back home” (17).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Portes’s and Rumbaut’s *Immigrant America* was revised, expanded and updated in 2006. On the question of immigrant types, this third edition does not depart from the 1996 edition cited in the text: under the section “Immigrants and their Types,” the authors discuss the same four groups: 1) labor migrants, 2) professional immigrants, 3) entrepreneurial immigrants, and 4) refugees and asylees. As in the 1996 second edition, they use the word “migrants” for the first category and the word “immigrants” for the second and third (as far as I can tell they do not explain why). But in this third edition the reference to “migrants” who stay and “migrants” who return has been deleted (or moved somewhere else where I could not find it). The typology on page 21 does mention “temporary” and “permanent”

The distinction seems to echo the settler and colonist types as defined by W.I. Thomas in *Old World*, but an important difference emerges. While the old classification was based on the migrant's wishes, the new subtypes are based on the migrants' actual action—some stay, many return. Thomas's "settler" and "colonist" are not defined by factually settling or going back home; what matters is their orientation toward settling or going back. Portes and Rumbaut claim to divide immigrants into those who stay and those who go back, but instead they are dividing them into those who *will* (presumably) stay and those who *will* (presumably) go back. By bringing the future into their typology of the present, they understate the uncertainty of immigrant life; they point to the outcome—some stay, some return—without examining the process accounting for it.

The settler and colonist types discussed by Thomas, however, are still central to immigration research (even if seldom addressed as such). The settler type is the object of the literature on immigrant assimilation.⁵⁰ The colonist is the focus of the literature on transnationalism.

In their recent attempt to rescue the concept of assimilation from its critics, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003 and 2007) argue that assimilation is not imposed upon immigrants, but it is rather the consequence of their own individual choices. It is not, however, that immigrants choose to assimilate explicitly; assimilation is an

immigrants, but these are legal categories (types of visas); they are not about what migrants actually do or wish to do.

⁵⁰ For the purpose of this discussion I use "settlement" and "assimilation" interchangeably, but much of the literature on immigration is precisely about whether or not the two concepts can be associated. Even the children of immigrants, born in the United States, are not always considered to have fully assimilated. The discussion is present in *Old World* and other Chicago-era studies, and in books such as Herbert Gans's *The Urban Villagers* (1962) and other studies of life in immigrant "ghettos." On more recent debates about the second generation's assimilation: Portes and Zhou (1993) and Perlmann and Waldinger (1997).

“unanticipated consequence” of behavior oriented to successful accommodation (2007: 132).⁵¹

On the one hand, this approach to assimilation resembles the settler type in *Old World*. Not everyone plans to settle from the beginning, but “perhaps after a series of hardships here” (Thomas 1921: 83) some migrants may change their mind. Yet an important difference remains. Referring to 128 life histories of Swedish settlers in the United States, Thomas sums up the most general attitude in them: “I have been successful. I have property. My children have superior advantages. But *I have lost my life* (93).” Assimilation may be unanticipated, but that does not mean that migrants will not notice it—and perhaps regret it. By modeling assimilation (or settling) as an unanticipated consequence, Alba and Nee make it look smoother than it may be. The authors seek to explain why “temporary” immigrants may *inadvertently* become “permanent” immigrants; they say little about the tension involved.⁵²

⁵¹ The word “assimilation” suggests that the United States assimilates immigrants, as one assimilates food—the idea that immigrants assimilate themselves into the United States would be similar to the idea that food assimilates itself into our body (not impossible, but strange). Assimilation, in any case, is not discussed by Alba and Nee (2007) in terms of whether immigrants consider themselves “assimilated” or not; they define assimilation as a more or less “objective” variable. The book has been considered the “authoritative synthesis of the present processes of assimilation” by Orlando Paterson in the *New York Times* (2009). The food metaphor is old. Historian John Higham quotes the pro-restrictionist press in 1888: “The strong stomach of American civilization may, and doubtless will, digest and assimilate ultimately this unsavory and repellent throng” (quoted in Higham [1955] 1994: 63). Food and immigration, of course, are connected in many ways, as suggested by the image of the melting pot. The work on food and immigration includes, among many others, Sidney Mintz’s (1996) chapter on “Eating American,” Donna Gabaccia’s (1998) *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, and the recent report by Van Hook et al. (2009) on “Moving to the Land of Milk and Cookies: Obesity among the Children of Immigrants.”

⁵² It is telling that the authors use the word “unanticipated” rather than the word “unintended” associated with Max Weber, who wrote about the “paradoxical results of action” and the “unintended consequences of action” (Swedberg 2005: 192 and 281). In introducing the idea into American sociology in his article on “The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action,” Robert K. Merton (1936) seems to have pioneered this use. Merton notes that “*unforeseen* consequences should not be identified with consequences which are necessarily undesirable (from the standpoint of the actor). For though these results are unintended, they are not always deemed axiomatically negative. In short, undesired effects are not always undesirable effects” (895). Action, according to this formulation, can have “unintended” consequences that are not unwelcomed—even when they were not intended. The word “unanticipated,” then, is a better choice, given that it seems more compatible than “unintended” with the “gratifying surprises” that action can bring about. This use of the concept departs from Weber’s: capitalism, from the standpoint of the Protestant ethic, was both undesired and undesirable. By using “unanticipated” instead of “unintended,” Alba and Nee follow the Merton approach, implying

The colonist type discussed in *Old World* has evolved into the transnational migrant, or “transmigrant,” one of the most salient concepts in the literature on present immigration. Transnationalism emphasizes the ongoing ties across the sending and receiving countries. Thomas’s “colonist,” in this sense, “one who never forgets nor wishes to forget” (1921: 93), does look similar to the transnational migrant; both types are defined by continuous political and economic engagements in the homeland. But, once again, continuities and discontinuities between the old and new literature coexist.⁵³

In Thomas’s discussion, the colonist’s ties to the home country are part of his or her wish to return; the Italian and Polish documents included present migrants who wish and are certain to go back. For the transnational migrant, on the other hand, the idea of return is much less prominent. In detailing the factors influencing immigrants’ transnationalism, Eva Morawska does mention the “sojourner mentality” as contributing to the intensity of transnational ties (2007: 156). But this is only one among “more than 30 factors” (2007: 153). The colonists remained tied to their homeland because of their wishes to return. The transnational migrants may remain strongly involved with their homeland, but that does not mean they think about going back. The colonists were contradictory figures, as they wished to return but often did not. The transnational migrants do not think about return. Because in their experience

that assimilation—the unanticipated consequence of the immigrants’ attempts at accommodation—is not “undesirable” from the actors’ perspective.

⁵³ The literature and debate on transnationalism are alive and well. I follow Morawska’s (2007) article because it offers an effective synthesis. Another helpful synthesis is the one by Levitt and Jaworsky (2007), who take distance from the “celebratory” tone sometimes present in studies of “transnational” life. Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) offer an important critique, suggesting that, contrary to the transnational view, the “rise of massive state apparatuses *controlling* population movements between states represents [today] the most striking development” (1188). Foner (2005) compares “old” and “new” transnationalism.

“here” and “there” are closely mixed up, no meaningful distinction between “temporary” and “permanent” needs to be drawn.⁵⁴

On the whole, the main lines of migration research do not seem to pay much attention to time. When assimilation is emphasized, time is diluted into an eternal future where immigrants or their children—or grandchildren—will eventually “assimilate”; unless seen as an obstacle slowing down the process, there is no discussion of the migrant’s past.⁵⁵ When transnationalism is emphasized, time is transcended by an eternally floating migrant; since there are no “here” and “there,” no one has to think about returning or settling down.

Less United States-centered approaches more easily recognize time-frames as important components of migration. Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, for instance, establish that most “economic migrants” want “to save enough in a higher-wage economy to improve conditions at home.” Some of them return, some stay in the

⁵⁴ Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1995) make it clear that the transnational migrant is not (or not necessarily) a temporary migrant: transnational migrants maintain strong connections with their countries of origin, but “They are not sojourners because they settle and become incorporated in the economy and political institutions, localities, and patterns of daily life of the country in which they reside” (48).

⁵⁵ In Michael Jones-Correa’s (1998) study of immigrant political participation in New York City, for instance, the past appears as an obstacle for immigrants to participating in the new society. Jones-Correa points to the “myth of return” (91) as an explanation for why immigrants are slow to naturalize and to participate in American politics. The myth or “ideology of return” (102) punishes those thinking about cutting off their political ties with the homeland through the acquisition of American citizenship. The past, then, or the ties to the homeland, make it difficult for immigrants to take part in American institutional life. This approach is not entirely different from the classical socialist analysis of the immigrant foundations of the American working class. In Gabriel Kolko’s formulation: “More fundamental about those immigrants who came to the United States from Southern and Eastern Europe is that, excepting the Jews, the vast majority came with the explicit intent of remaining temporally . . . On this point there is no dispute, and it means that in terms of subjective orientation a large section of the de facto American working class was a transitional one, just as it was to be in physical fact for an astonishingly large proportion of returnees. In short, at a critical phase in its development the diversity and complex motivations of workers in America produced a specific consciousness unlike any known in Europe, with the emergence of a sizable working class that never regarded the place and difficulties of work as more than a transitional experience. For them, escape from such endurance was not to be found in America but in their return to Europe at an elevated status . . . Mainly reluctant migrants who would have preferred living a decent existence at home, those among them who remained produced an unwilling, even accidental working class stratified in a manner distinctive in the history of any industrialized society” ([1976] 1984: 69-70). The key word here is “astonishingly.”

receiving country, and this may be due to either “relative success” or “relative failure,” as migrants do not achieve their aims and need to stay longer, eventually settling down (2003: 31). The process leading from “temporary” to “permanent” emigration is acknowledged, but barely described or explained: it just happens that some migrants eventually settle down.

In sum, much of the literature on European immigration focused on integration into the new society (even if books like *Old World* allowed for temporal ambiguity). The more recent literature seems even more blinded to the question of time. Temporary and permanent migration are recognized, but only marginally. Neither return nor the intention to return has been studied enough.⁵⁶

The neglect of time runs parallel to another neglect. Compared to the old literature, more recent research is relatively insensitive to immigrant pain, and the two

⁵⁶ There are important exceptions, particularly in the study of Mexican migration: for instance Chavez 1988 and Massey et al. 1987. None of the recent edited collections in the field of migration (Hirschman, Kasinitz, and Dewind 1999; Waters and Ueda 2007; Portes and Dewind 2008) has articles dealing with either return migration or the tension between temporary and permanent migration. Waters and Ueda (2007)’s edited collection refers to migrants as *The New Americans* and features a photograph of a naturalization oath ceremony on the cover, which suggests little space for return. This approach can be contrasted with Wyman’s writing about some of the earlier immigrants: “[They] considered it impractical to devote time and money to such activities as learning English, attending citizenship classes, or joining American organizations, even if time and money were available. They simply did not plan to become Americans” (63-4). It must be said, however, that the *The New Americans*’ single article on “Unauthorized Migration” does emphasize temporality: “Much of the historical and current debate about unauthorized migration derives from differences in perceptions about whether sojourners or settlers dominate such flows” (Bean and Lowell 2007: 73). Peggy Levitt’s (2001) book on Dominican transnationalism acknowledges that “Almost everyone who leaves Miraflores [the village she studied in the Dominican Republic] does so with the intention to return” (92). The next sentence, however, states that most migrants “remain in the United States, and the longer they do so, the less likely it is that they will live in Miraflores during their working years” (92). The author discusses the difficulties that migrants who do return face back in the Dominican Republic, but not why so few return (92-96). The lack of attention to return migration, more generally, partially explains (and is partially explained by) what seems to be a lack of good statistics on return. Mulder et al. 2001 and 2002 are working papers from the U.S. Census Bureau explaining the difficulties to estimate the number of “foreign-born emigrants” (as the Census calls return migrants). The sociology of work, on the other hand, does seem to think of immigrants as temporary: “From the cohort/encoding point of view adopted here, it is important to note, first, that much labor migration is temporary. The United States, for example, is estimated to have lost about one-third of those who emigrated to it between 1900 and 1980” (Abbott 2005: 321).

absences are connected.⁵⁷ As plans do not work out and time slips away, suffering cannot be put in perspective. Past research could frame immigrant suffering as necessary; it could dissolve it into history. Present research finds it more difficult to do the same. Without distinguishing between present and future, without acknowledging the redemptive hope of return—then how to make sense of pain? To disregard suffering, in turn, makes it easier to ignore time—indeed, if there is no pain, why might anyone want to go back?

III. From Plants to Birds

Plants are one common source of metaphors for immigration (*uprooted*, *transplanted*). Birds are another. Plants can be moved, but the process is delicate and painful, and once they have been moved it is unlikely that they will move again. Birds move back and forth, undertaking seasonal journeys more or less regularly. While much of the literature in the field tends to assume that migrants come to the United States to stay, temporary migration has also been addressed. In this section I draw from economic sociology to discuss economist Michael Piore's *Birds of Passage* (1979), an important and frequently cited work.

Conventional economic models explain labor migration in terms of international wage differentials. As long as some countries pay higher wages than others, workers will continue to migrate. In Piore's view, however, while wage differentials play an essential role, they are not the only factor. To begin with, they do not explain why migrants are highly concentrated in some sectors of the labor market

⁵⁷ Portes and Rumbaut (1996 and 2006), for instance, concentrate their references to suffering in their chapter on mental illness. Some of the questions that *Old World Traits Transplanted* or *The Uprooted* considered central to the immigration experience are now seen as significant but relatively marginal medical issues. On the other hand, some studies carefully analyze immigrant suffering: Sarah Mahler's (1995) work on Salvadorans on Long Island and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2001) work on domestic servants in California. Art is more perceptive than social science: Madelaine Hron (2009) studies "Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture."

and almost absent in others: while wage differentials can be found all across the economy, migrants are typically concentrated in certain jobs.

The jobs where migrant workers concentrate are at the bottom of the job hierarchy. They are usually unskilled and tend “to carry or connote inferior social status; they often involve hard or unpleasant conditions and considerable insecurity; they seldom offer chances of advancing toward better-paying, more attractive job opportunities” (17). Additionally, migrant jobs are often the most exposed to economic instability—they are part of the least stable portion of the labor market (what Piore calls “secondary labor market”). Whether at the bottom of the labor market or at its margins, the jobs where migrants concentrate are the least desired ones.

Unattractive as they are, these jobs cannot be eliminated. As long as there is a job hierarchy, there will be jobs at the bottom. As long as there is instability in the economy, there will be jobs that are the least secure.⁵⁸ Employers trying to fill these jobs will not have an easy time to motivate workers. Even if wages and other conditions were to be improved, there is no escaping the fact that some jobs will be the worst ones. Workers will be reluctant to take these jobs. As the problem of “manning the lower rungs of the job hierarchy” (35) suggests, economic incentives may not always be enough to motivate workers.

The understanding of these motivational problems requires going into “aspects of socioeconomic behavior from which orthodox [economic] theory explicitly abstracts and deliberately neglects” (7). Workers reject jobs at the bottom (as well as unstable or “secondary” jobs) not so much because income is low—they reject them because work is about more than income. To the extent that jobs, and the work they

⁵⁸ Even though they sometimes overlap, unstable jobs and the jobs at the bottom present different problems. Unstable jobs can be made stable if companies internalize the cost of instability by keeping employees in their payroll regardless of demand level (Piore 1979: 38). The jobs at the bottom, on the other hand, cannot be eliminated without eliminating the hierarchy (31-3).

entail, serve “to define our social and personal selves, there are considerable limits upon what we feel willing to and able to do simply to earn money” (52). Thus, “The social role of the job itself limits considerably the degree to which people will respond to economic incentives” (52).

Migrant workers, however, are notably less reluctant than native workers to take these jobs. In other words, migrants react to economic incentives to which native workers do not. The difference, in Piore’s view, is that native workers are subject to social constraints making them reject jobs at the bottom of the job hierarchy (regardless of economic incentives).⁵⁹ Thus, if higher wages do attract migrants, it must be because migrants are not part of the same social context as native workers (they are not subject to the same constraints). In fact, argues Piore, migrants are not part of any social context at all; they are true economic men, “the closest real thing in real life to the *homo economicus* of economic theory” (54).⁶⁰ Because “they come

⁵⁹ Do native workers actually reject these jobs? Piore’s point is not that no native workers will do these jobs, but that many will be reluctant to do them. Two recent books (Ehrenreich 2001 and Shipler 2004) exploring the jobs at the bottom report about American workers at such jobs, even though both emphasize their “invisibility” (Ehrenreich, who worked low-wage jobs to gather material for her book, reports having had to look for very “white” places [such as Maine] to be hired in such jobs). How do American workers think about their jobs? Lamont (2007) studies the world of blue-collar workers (not at the bottom) and their understanding of dignity. Sennet and Cobb’s *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972) interrogates more broadly the meaning of work in the workers’ eyes. Bourgeois’s *In Search of Respect* (1995) discusses how young Americans living in New York City’s El Barrio feel about the low-wage jobs available to them. Juravich (2009) writes about both immigrant and American workers in the degraded American workplace, *without* emphasizing the differences between the two. There is a sort of old-fashioned functionalist flavor to Piore’s worries about workers’ motivation (including his references to “structural wage inflation”). Things have changed since 1979 and new labor-market and political conditions may have made native workers less reluctant to work the jobs at the bottom. The fact remains, however, that employers still tend to hire migrant workers for the worst jobs. Waldinger and Lichter (2003) address some of the differences between immigrant and native workers in the Los Angeles area from the viewpoint of the employers.

⁶⁰ The *homo economicus* is the “isolated, all-knowing, and maximizing economic agent” characteristic of economic models (Swedberg 2003: 3). Bourdieu says that the idea of *homo economicus* represents “a kind of anthropological monster” (quoted in Swedberg 2003: 48). The immigrant *homo economicus* is isolated, not necessarily all-knowing, and maximizing only in terms of the future: his or her present life is extremely ascetic (Piore 1979: 62).

from outside and remain apart the social structure in which the jobs are located” (34), migrants respond to economic incentives in ways native workers would not.⁶¹

Migrants’ existence outside the social structure, however, hinges upon the *temporary* character of migration. “It is only in the comparatively unique case of the temporary migrant that work is simply a means to an end, a situation in which most jobs can be reduced to the income that they offer” (34). Migrants think as purely economic men (outside the social structure) only insofar as they conceive of migration as temporary. It is the temporary character of migration—much more fundamentally than income level—that distinguishes migrants from native workers. It is only because they think of work at the bottom of the hierarchy as temporary—and somehow foreign to their own life—that they are willing to take these jobs.⁶²

More than 30 years after the publication of *Birds of Passage*, the reception of these ideas seems to have been incomplete. Piore’s concept of segmented labor market

⁶¹ This is not new. Historian Mark Wyman writes: “The thought runs like a main current through the 1880-1930 immigration into the United States. Immigrants came to the New World to acquire savings . . . The American dollar was their goal. It dictated every move, with plans to quickly return when enough dollars were collected . . .” (1993: 59).

⁶² This conceptualization of migration is already present in Max Weber’s ([1894] 1979) analysis of migrant rural labor—both internal migrants and Polish workers—in eastern Germany. The new methods of “intensive cultivation” increased the need for seasonal labor, and this need—combined with “modern means of travel”—gave rise to “a new class of workers: migrant workers, who were exclusively *seasonal* agricultural laborers.” The seasonal workforce is different: “Piece rates increase performance, but the workers are themselves more willing to work; Polish girls who at home have no such wages to spur them on here work exceptionally hard. The migrant worker, torn from his family and usual environment, is regarded as simple labor power both by the landlords [who employ him] and by himself.” The working and living conditions are particularly bad: “The barracks of the migrant workers are the money-economy equivalents of the slave barracks of antiquity. The estate owner saves on workers’ housing, since accommodation for the migrant costs little or nothing. He also has no need to allocate plots of land, but above all he is not regulated by laws governing conditions of work and pay” (192-3). Additionally, Weber writes, “The control over the Poles is limitless: one nod, and the local administrator—who is also an estate owner—sends him back to Poland” (199). Weber asks why people migrate: “What are the reasons from the worker’s point of view for the adoption of migration?” The prime cause appears to be the “difference in the level of wages,” Weber starts off. But, like Piore eighty years later, Weber quickly changes course. “[Where] such differences, or related factors, do not arise, migration still takes place.” So why do they migrate? “A combination of economic and psychological factors explain this. The migrant would not accept at home the kind of living conditions (and diet is not the only, or even principal, factor here) that are offered to him by a distant place of work. Because of this lower standard and because of the lack of the usual additional tasks that face him in his home he is able to save significant amounts from his wages even when they are not higher than the local rates, something that would have not been possible had he not migrated” (193).

is often employed to account for the demand of migrant labor. On the other hand, explanations for the supply of migrants, or why people migrate, do not often take Piore's insights into consideration.⁶³ Attempts at theoretical synthesis in the field (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Massey 1999) rely on models from the new economics of labor migration; while these models portray migration decisions more realistically than the neoclassical models, they do not depart from the original framework, largely oriented toward cost-benefit calculations.⁶⁴

In the last decades, however, developments in economic sociology have challenged the approach to economic action characteristic of economic models. Starting with Mark Granovetter's (1985) critique of Oliver Williamson, work in economic sociology has emphasized the "embeddedness" of economic action in social relationships to shed a new light on economic decision-making. How is the emphasis on embeddedness useful in accounting for migration decisions? How is the decision to migrate embedded in social life?

⁶³ This statement, like much of this discussion, is limited to some attempts at theoretical synthesis (Massey et al. 1993; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Massey 1999) in an otherwise diverse field. By and large, migration decisions are analyzed at two levels: the decision itself and the context in which the decision is made. While the cost-benefit calculations depicted in economic models explain why people migrate at the micro level, macro sociological theories are invoked to account for the larger context in which the migration decisions are made (the authors refer to "macrolevel forces that are exogenous to actors" but can have "rather pronounced effects in raising or lowering the probability of international migration" [2002: 13]). The distinction between migrants' decisions and the context in which such decisions are made recalls the old agency (decision) and structure (context) dilemma, which has long been associated with a particular division of labor within the social sciences: the study of decisions (agency) has been relegated to economics, and the study of the context in which decisions are made (structure) to sociology. The context or structure that sociology studies matters because it raises or lowers the probability of migration—yet the reasoning underlying the migration decision is left to economic models. In Douglas Massey's words, the understanding of migration requires examining "the motivations, goals, and aspirations of the people who respond to . . . structural forces by becoming international migrants" (1999: 50). Economic models deal with the motivations, goals, and aspirations (either individually or at the household level); sociological theories address the structural forces. In the last decades, however, the "new" economic sociology has attempted to overcome the division of labor between economics (looking at decisions) and sociology (looking at the context in which decisions are made).

⁶⁴ Models in the new economics of labor migration do not assume "that migration decisions are made by isolated actors, but that they are taken within larger units of interrelated people, typically families or households but sometimes entire communities" (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002: 11). Also, they accept that "people not only act . . . to maximize expected income" (as more basic economic models would predict) but also "work . . . to overcome failures in capital, credit, and insurance markets" (11).

Piore, in fact, used the concept of embeddedness (1979: 34) several years before Granovetter, and not exactly in the same way. In Granovetter's use of the concept, embeddedness refers to the role of social relationships (networks) in constraining economic behavior. Piore's use of embeddedness points to something slightly different: it also refers to social relationships as constraints, but these relationships are organized as hierarchies and tend to be more abstract. They are not necessarily personal relationships, as Granovetter's use of the concept suggests. The social relationships Piore has in mind are the often nameless people we perceive to be below and above us. Hierarchies, then, or vertical (and abstract) rather than horizontal (and personal) networks, make up the social terrain migrants decide to leave behind.⁶⁵

That migrants' decision to migrate is "embedded" in the social hierarchy in their country—or that the migrant's social position accounts for many migration decisions—makes it easier to perceive the *relative* nature of migrants' needs and desires. The sociology of migration sometimes uses the concept of "relative deprivation," but not meaning the same. Portes and Rumbaut, for instance, write that "The basic reason [why people migrate] is the gap between life aspirations and expectations and the means to fulfill them in the sending countries" (1996: 12). In this view, migrants' willingness to migrate does not depend on what migrants do not have but on what they want; their deprivation is *relative* to their aspirations.⁶⁶ A focus on

⁶⁵ Discussing over- and under-socialized conceptions of economic action, Granovetter (1992a) criticizes the "economists who try to incorporate social influences on economic action [and] fall so easily into oversocialized arguments"—and refers to work by Piore. Granovetter suggests sticking to the analysis of "concrete, ongoing systems of social relations" (1992a: 6). Granovetter's concept of embeddedness, in turn, has been criticized for being too narrow (Zukin and DiMaggio 1990; Bourdieu 2005).

⁶⁶ According to *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology* (2006), edited by Bryan Turner, the concept of "relative deprivation" was introduced by Samuel Stouffer and his coworkers in *The American Soldier* (1949). In the Stouffer study, the dictionary reports, "Soldiers posted overseas, for example, experienced a sense of deprivation relative to soldiers still at home, but felt less deprivation relative to the combat soldier" (503). The focus seems to have been on "comparisons between the levels of deprivation suffered by different groups" (503). Portes and Rumbaut's use of "deprivation," on the other hand, seems more in the "absolute" than "relative" sense, as the comparison is not between different groups but between what people have and what they want. Robert Merton discusses *The American Soldier* and distinguishes between *relative deprivation* and *relative deprivation* (1968: 288).

the migrants' social position, however, suggests something else: migrants' willingness to migrate does not depend on what they do not have but on what people above and below them are perceived to have. Migrants' deprivation is *relative* to their perceived position in the social hierarchy, and their migration decision must be seen in connection to an imagined position: an idea of who they are and should be.⁶⁷

While economic sociology has not been absent from the studies of migration, most uses of the concept of embeddedness have focused on immigrants already in the receiving country, particularly so-called immigrant communities and ethnic economies (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes 1995). When explaining why migrants leave, on the other hand, scholars tend to ignore economic sociology and emphasize individual or household decision-making. Based on Michael Piore's model of short-term migration, I suggest that the opposite approach is possible. Migrants' decisions to leave are embedded in dense and hierarchically structured social spaces. Immigrant life in the receiving country tends to be lonely.⁶⁸ As she or he leaves one place for the

⁶⁷ So why do migrants leave? What kind of "decision" do they make? A general answer cannot go beyond mapping out several possible types. While economic models focus on instrumental action, emphasizing cost-benefit calculations, it seems clear that migrants' "choices" are often either value-rational or emotional. But is it material or ideal interests that matter most? Can they be told apart? Richard Swedberg (2005) approaches the concept of interest by means of an analogy: interest is an activity (a type of action) that can be pictured as the "following of a sign-post" (95). While the concept of interest is employed in many different contexts, this approach resonates particularly well when thinking about migration. There is a body and there is a sign; and there is the actual following of the sign. The analogy acknowledges the limits of what we know: migration can be undertaken for instrumental, value-rational, or emotional reasons; both material and ideal interests can play a part. But in acknowledging the spectrum of immigrant motivation, the analogy underscores an essential but sometimes forgotten aspect: physical movement—as opposed to calculation. "When actors decide to pursue their interests," writes Swedberg, "they do so with themselves and their bodies at stake" (96). We cannot know in advance why people migrate—there are different reasons and migrants themselves may not know it; but there is the physicality of leaving one place for another. More than on abstract calculations, studies of migrant decision-making must focus on the "distinct awareness" of the moment: "a certain alertness and a readiness (and capacity) to think and act in a deliberate manner" (98)—along with the conditions that make this possible.

⁶⁸ A *New York Times* article on Mexicans in the NYC labor force interviews sociologist Robert Smith: "Employers love them because they want to work as many hours as they can . . . Americans expect accommodations to be made in their personal lives. But these guys have no personal lives." And then: "These guys are away from their families for years a time. There's a tremendous amount of loneliness and alcohol abuse" (Semple 2010). I have found few refutations of the notion of "immigrant community" more effective than this urban legend from the Haitian "community" in Brooklyn presented by Edwidge Danticat (2007: 92): "A woman was robbed weekly by a masked young man in

other, the “social” migrant turns into the solitary *homo economicus*. Why do they do it? Because they know it will not last long. As Piore himself acknowledged, however, it often does last long. The birds of passage do not find the way back.⁶⁹

IV. A Sociology of Waiting?

How does “temporary” immigration become “permanent”? Why do emigrants not return? Max Weber defined social action as including “both the failure to act and

the elevator of her apartment building. One day she carried a kitchen knife, which she used to stab her robber. When she removed the thief’s mask, she realized it was her son.”

⁶⁹ Piore (1979) writes: “There is an important difference between the original intent of the migrant and his or her actual stay, which is often longer” (51). Though “nobody may intend to stay, a nucleus of more or less permanent migrants seems inevitably to grow up” (52). But why do they stay? What does “inevitably” mean? Piore offers an explanation, but not an entirely satisfactory one. The migrant’s “temporary commitment,” Piore says, “is itself transitory” (60), meaning that it ends up becoming transitory, as temporary migrants end up settling down (which Piore defines as failing, at least when measured against their initial motivation). But why do they end up staying? Why do they abandon their plans? One reason is that “People who advance in the industrial society tend to develop an attachment to it” (60). But what about those who do not “advance”? Piore’s answer is “community development” (61): “The radical individualism that characterizes migrant behavior in the very early stages, which underlies the conventional economic theory of man, is essentially not a human condition. People do not live naturally so totally divorced from social ties and a structured set of community relationships and they do not live long together without the rudiments of such a structure developing” (62). The uprooted, in other words, start to put down roots: “The men, living impersonally side by side, take off a Saturday night to get drunk; the drunk extends into Sunday morning and begins to conflict with some of the extra work” (62). Sooner or later love knocks on the door: “So people begin to form liaisons, most often thought at first to be temporary but which develop a kind of permanence. Some of these liaisons then become a second family or a substitute for the family the migrants” left at home (63). Community develops, migrants put down roots, and they end up staying much longer than planned. I see at least two problems with this explanation: 1) First, what do we mean by roots? The *homo economicus* gets drunk, makes friends, and falls in love. But is it possible to equate these connections—meaningful as they are—with the social order (or disorder) back home? Solidarity (or “community”) in the immigrant world tends to run low (as shown by Mahler [1995] in her study of Salvadorans and South Americans on Long Island or Guarnizo, Sánchez, and Roach [1999] on Colombians in New York City and Los Angeles; and also, more generally, Bourdieu 1999). 2) Second, even when community actually develops, how long does it take? Sooner or later, migrants might form new friendships and families; having children here, in particular, can make it difficult for them to go back. But does this happen in their first, second, third year in the new country? Piore presents the new roots as the cause for migrants to stay longer; I think they are also the consequence: migrants start to put down roots because they stay longer than planned. Michael Jones-Correa acknowledges that “Many of the Latin American migrants to New York City exhibit a sojourner mentality,” but they often end up remaining in the United States (1998: 94-5): “Why do some immigrants to the United States signal their wish to go back and then remain?” Jones-Correa follows Piore’s approach: the *homo economicus* identity cannot be sustained (99); social networks develop, an immigrant community matures, lives get complicated, “return may be put off indefinitely, and they may de facto decide to stay” (99). Again, I believe something is missing: there is an unexplained gap between the first years—the more or less original plan—and the growing of social roots (if roots actually grow). Time goes by and people stay. But why?

passive acquiescence,” but he did not elaborate much on this point ([1922] 1978: 22).⁷⁰ One problem is why someone becomes an emigrant; another problem is why someone remains such. Becoming an emigrant is based on making one big decision; remaining an emigrant is based on postponing another big decision. Social science focuses on explaining decision-making. But how to understand the “failure to act”?

Three aspects of the immigrant condition help us understand why making choices can become difficult. First, migration involves leaving “society” (family, community, nation) for the “market” (or the labor market). Second, migration often involves downward social mobility. Third, migration—particularly recent migration—tends to involve the lack of legal status. As things turn out to be more complicated than expected and time goes by, the three changes—leaving, falling, hiding—begin to permeate the migrants’ understanding of their own plans.

Leaving

As much as they keep one foot back in their home country, migrants are not home anymore. As much as migration is an attempt at moving *across* the social hierarchy back home, it first requires moving *outside* the social hierarchy back home. Migration involves stepping out of the social hierarchy; it involves “suspending” the ties with the social structure back home. For them to do what they have to, migrants detach themselves from the context in which the migration decision was made. Distance must be carefully managed—far enough so they can focus on income and disregard

⁷⁰ What is the difference between action and non-action? What would a typology of non-action look like? Non-action can be more or less instrumentally rational or value-rational, but, in general, it seems likely to be less rational, as not doing something tends to require less deliberation than doing it. On the other hand, there are cases where non-action is a form of action. The idea of passive-aggression, for instance, involves more or less *deliberate* lack of action; it is action masked as non-action. The opposite case is also common: non-action masked as action (doing something as a way of doing nothing). The temporary immigrant’s failure to act—to return home—seems to belong in that second type (non-action masked as action). More generally, one difference between action and non-action is that action tends to be concentrated in time; non-action tends to be more spread out.

everything else, yet close enough so the original purpose does not get lost. Migrants need to change without changing—to forget who they were without forgetting too much.

Migration involves a particular relation to the social structure. It is not the absence of social structure characteristic of economic models. It is not the notion of embeddedness as developed in economic sociology, where social constraints impose limits on economic action. It is some sort of temporary “suspension” of the ties between the migrant and her or his social world. While the decision to migrate is made within quite “visible” social hierarchies, migration takes the migrants away from such structures. Migrants are still connected to their worlds but the links grow thinner and more fragile. Their very local quest for social mobility takes migrants away from their setting. So they can be who they want to be, they embark on journeys taking them far away from who they are.

The ambiguous connection between migrant and social structure recalls of Simmel’s description of the adventure: “More generally, the most general form of the adventure is its dropping out of the continuity of life. ‘Wholeness of life,’ after all, refers to the fact that a consistent process runs through the individual components of life, however crassly and irreconcilably distinct they may be. What we call an adventure stands in contrast to that interlocking of life-links, to that feeling that those countercurrents, turnings, and knots still, after all, spin forth a continuous thread. An adventure is certainly a part of our existence, directly contiguous with other parts which precede and follow it; at the same time, however, in its deeper meaning, it occurs outside the usual continuity of this life” ([1911] 1971: 187-8).

An adventure is part of our existence, and yet it occurs outside the continuity of our life. A real adventure, someone could say, the adventure that is slightly more

than an adventure, is the one from which you do not come back.⁷¹ Once emigrants are outside the social structure in which they decided to migrate, how can they find their way back? The further away from our life the adventure takes us, the more difficult to return. Detached from the continuity of their life, immigrants can get lost. In looking to improve their situation back home, migrants, not unlike gamblers, put their social lives at stake and turn into—temporary—*homines economici*. But how to get back? Disembedded from their social connections, having lost the frame of reference, with no firm ground to stand on, how can migrants decide?

Falling

If migrants do jobs that they would not do in their home countries, it must be because they do not come from the lowest strata, where they would have already been doing these jobs.⁷² People at the bottom of the hierarchy do not often emigrate. Portes and Rumbaut sum up the available studies: “The very poor and the unemployed seldom migrate, either legally or illegally; and [even] unauthorized immigrants tend to have

⁷¹ Alfred Schuetz (1945) writes about “The Homecomer.” Schuetz has the case of the WWII veterans in mind, but he extends his analysis to other cases, including the emigrant who returns to his native land (370). Home, Schuetz writes, means “to have in common with others a section of space and time, and therewith surrounding objects as possible ends and means, and interests based upon an underlying more or less homogenous system of relevances.” And he continues: “This is the aspect of the social structure of the home world for the man who lives in it. The aspect changes entirely for the man who has left home. To him life at home is not accessible in its immediacy. He has stepped, so to speak, into another social dimension not covered by the system of coordinates used as the scheme of reference for life at home” (372). Once the “community of space and time” (372) has been cut off, it is not easy to communicate and it is not easy to come back. People back home have changed, and migrants have changed: “To a certain extent, each homecomer has tasted the magic fruit of strangeness, be it sweet or bitter. Even amid the overwhelming longing for home there remains the wish to transplant into the old pattern something of the novel goals, of the newly discovered means to realize them, of the skills and experiences acquired abroad” (375).

⁷² Piore (1979) emphasizes the connection between immigrant jobs and short-term orientation; only temporary migrants take the jobs at the very bottom. When writing about migrant origins, however, Piore says that “the kinds of migrants upon which we are focusing possess, in addition to the temporary nature of their initial migration decision, a second distinguishing characteristic: They tend to come from underdeveloped rural areas. Consequently, they are frequently illiterate . . .” (1979: 57). If this is the case, it is not entirely clear why taking the jobs at the bottom would represent so much change for them—lured by the higher wages, they would more easily adjust. But this may be not the case: immigrants of rural origin can find urban jobs (or certain aspects of urban jobs) particularly bad; or they may have to overcome gendered norms to do “female” jobs (for instance in cleaning or cooking).

above-average levels of education and occupational skills in comparison with their homeland populations” (1996: 10).⁷³ As migrants move from one country to another, their relative social position goes down. Even when they are “poor,” they are moving from positions that are somewhere in the middle down to the lowest rungs.⁷⁴

Migrant downward mobility may be more prominent for the more recent immigration, but is not new. A statistical analysis published in 1921 concluded that “on the whole neither the immigrant agricultural workers nor the immigrant skilled workers follow their former occupations to a large extent after coming to the United States” (Bloch 1921: 762-3). Everett Stonequist, more generally, added the experience of the *déclassé* to those of the *dépaysé* and *déraciné* in describing the European emigrant’s life: “In order to subsist, or support his family, an individual may have to take whatever job he can find. The personal satisfaction and social prestige which his

⁷³ In 2006 the Pew Hispanic Center estimated that “As much as 45% of the total unauthorized migrant population [had] entered the country with visas that allowed them to visit or reside in the U.S. for a limited amount of time” (Pew Hispanic Center 2006). This number suggests that many unauthorized workers had enough “credentials” back home—stable jobs, college degrees, property titles—to convince United States embassy officials to grant them a visa.

⁷⁴ The literature offers many but scattered references to immigrant downward mobility. Jones-Correa writes that “many of the Latin American migrants to New York City . . . were [in their home countries] perched precariously on the edge of the middle class” (1998: 94). Mahler compares South and Central Americans on Long Island: “[The] Salvadorans are principally from rural, peasant backgrounds, whereas the South Americans are overwhelmingly urban and exude the anxiety of the downwardly mobile middle class” (1995: 17). Hondagneu-Sotelo writes about domestic employees in Los Angeles: “[The] occupation draws not only women from the poor socioeconomic classes but also women of relatively high status in their own countries . . . [It] is not unusual to find middle-class, college-educated women working in other nations as domestic workers (2001: 19; also 198-203). Guarnizo and Espitia write about Colombians: “A particularly complicated question emerges in relation to the large group of new, well-educated Colombian immigrants who are undocumented. With the Colombian economy and violence continuing to be push factors for emigration, this population may continue to grow” (2007: 384). Margulis looks at the social class composition of Brazilians in New York City: “[A] far higher percentage of Brazilian immigrants in the New York sample are upper-middle, middle, or lower-middle class and a far lower percentage of them are working or lower class than is true for Brazilians in their native land” (1994: 86-7). Writing about Salvadoran immigrants, Menjivar reports that “even those with skills and/or high educational levels (including college graduates) and substantial work experience usually find themselves in low-level jobs when they are undocumented or in a legal limbo” (2007: 416). More generally, in a recent article about “First Generation Decline: Downward Mobility among Refugees and Immigrants,” Herbert Gans writes: “The failure of immigration researchers to pay sufficient attention downward mobility reflects a broader pattern in sociology. Despite notable exceptions, the huge literature on mobility includes endless studies of ‘status attainment’ but few of class and status decline” (2009: 1659).

work in the old country gave him are lost. He becomes a *déclassé*, and thus undergoes an experience which may be the most significant phase of his immigrant experience” (1937: 85).⁷⁵

But how does mobility work when taking place across borders? To fall down in the receiving hierarchy does not necessarily mean to fall down: the relevant structure is still in the sending country. As migrants start looking around, however, they see other migrants, often from the same place—but not the same social origin. Migration violently lumps people of different backgrounds together. Whatever the differences back home, here they all work the same jobs. No matter who they used to be, all migrants roll up their sleeves for dirty work. They might have hoped no one

⁷⁵ W.I. Thomas’s *Old World Traits Transplanted* (1921) refers to the “loss of status” among immigrants. Thomas writes: “But the most serious condition results from the loss of status and the consequent diminished sense of personality when the immigrant encounters American conditions. He brings with him certain habits, customs, and traditions, including language, dress, social ritual, sentimental ideals and interests, and a sense of moral worth, and it was in connection with these that that he had status at home (the recognition of his group) and a sense of personality (recognition of his role in the group)” (47). This and other references point to the general decline in status (recognition of the group) associated with the weakening of the “primary group” characteristic of modern societies. As immigrants move from the old hierarchy to the new one, and because in the modern world everyone is a stranger, status (recognition) goes down. Since the immigrants I am writing about pay less attention to the receiving hierarchy than to the sending one, downward mobility must be approached differently. Status also goes down—but not because it is less prominent in the United States than back home. Downward mobility occurs because the migrant’s *relative* position goes down vis-à-vis other immigrants’ position. A common complaint among immigrants is that in the United States no one cares about education; education, of course, is one of the central boundaries in the American social hierarchy, but in the immigrant world education is not recognized, as immigrants do similar jobs regardless of different education levels. In Thomas’s view, to repeat, the loss of status is “absolute,” and it stems from a different type of hierarchy. In the cases I have in mind, the loss of status is “relative,” and it stems from the conditions of immigration. The two approaches, however, can often overlap. Luin Goldring (1998) writes about status in “transnational social fields,” suggesting that “the claiming and valorization of social status” is an important reason why migrants maintain ties with the homeland: “Individuals and families can improve their houses, wear U.S. clothing styles, drive imported vehicles, buy rounds of drinks, travel to Mexico to get married, return for patron saint’s day, or engage in other practices and know that these claims to mobility, some of which are also claims to community membership, will be properly interpreted” (189). Like much of the literature on transnationalism, Goldring’s portrayal makes it look as if moving back and forth across the border is easy. Also, it may be the case that showing off status symbols in the sending country is an attempt to make up for status decline in the receiving country (as the claims to community membership are an attempt to make up for the absence). Status symbols are not the same as status; or, in other words, money cannot always buy status.

would see them, but their fellow countrymen are here as well. It is this sudden erosion of the old social boundaries that migrants experience as social descent.

Downward mobility—or the equalizing process that migration brings about—can take on several forms, and empirical research must deal with the variety and complexity of social hierarchies. There are differences between rural and urban hierarchies in the sending countries. Different societies place different value on education. Race matters in some places more than in others. In general there seem to be two important and nearly universal distinctions: manual versus non-manual work, and self-employment versus wage labor. Most immigrants do physical work, and few work by themselves. The adjustment to either condition will vary by the immigrant's background, but the combination of manual work and the new discipline—dealing with bosses, following a schedule, working by the hour—is central to immigrant survival.⁷⁶

So what do the changes mean? How do immigrant jobs impact immigrant lives? Emigrants leave their social position at home. They plan to work abroad for a while, no matter what kind of job, and then come back to their original position—or an improved version of it. But switching between social positions may be more difficult than it seems. For one thing, the original social positions will not be waiting for the emigrants to come back—things keep changing at home. Secondly, the emigrants themselves will lose touch with their previous job; their former work skills may deteriorate, and so may their social manners. Finally, the entire idea of work will steadily change; after several years of immigrant routine, immigrants may start thinking of work as both an absolute (either you work or you do not) and as something

⁷⁶ The literature on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigration has long discussed the impact of the new jobs upon the immigrants. Gabriel Kolko writes about the problems of “adjusting to a new national culture and industrialism at one and the same time” ([1976] 1984: 71). Wyman reports that immigrants going back to Europe referred to the United States as “the land of bosses and clocks” (1993: 87). There are not enough studies of how immigrants experience the new immigrant jobs, but there are some, such as Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's *Domestica* (2001).

completely removed from their life. Sooner or later, in sum, jobs become more than jobs. As things turn out thornier than expected and time dashes by, immigrants grow apart from the social positions they had occupied.

Hiding

In 1910 foreigners in the United States were largely from Europe (87%); today they are mostly from Latin America and Asia (54% and 27%).⁷⁷ Increased diversity was the consequence of the 1965 changes in immigration policy, but only to some extent.

“When the United States abolished the national origins quota system four decades after its adoption and simultaneously relinquished remaining barriers to Asian immigration,” Arisitide Zolberg explains, “it not only retained a quantitative limit on immigration from Europe, Asia, and Africa, but also simultaneously imposed one for the first time on immigration from the Western Hemisphere” (2006: 245).⁷⁸

The new restriction contributed to making undocumented immigration from Latin America an essential component of the immigration picture.⁷⁹ The question of

⁷⁷ The percentage of foreign-born has grown from an all-time low of 4.7% in 1970 to an estimated 12.5% in 2008, not too far from the 1910 historical peak (14%). The statistics were retrieved from <http://www.census.gov>.

⁷⁸ “Hardly noted in the extensive literature on the subject,” Zolberg goes on, “is that the reformers now tacitly accepted the restrictionists’ overall objective of keeping immigration within very limited bounds, and agreed that the ‘nation of immigrants’ was a thing of the past” (2006: 293). And he adds: “As the [1965] reform was celebrated at the Statue of Liberty, much less was said of the fact that the long-awaited reform also imposed unprecedented restrictions on browns and blacks from neighboring countries” (293). This is a very frequent omission. A recent edited collection in the field, for instance, says on the front flap: “The United States has always been a nation of immigrants, shaped by successive waves of new arrivals. The most recent transformation began when immigration laws and policies changed significantly in 1965, admitting migrants from around the world in new numbers and with varying backgrounds and aspirations” (Waters and Ueda 2007). No reference is made to the restrictive aspect of the new legislation and its possible consequences on the rise of undocumented immigration from Latin America. Similarly, Orlando Patterson (2009) writes in the *New York Times*: “Barack Obama’s historic victory was made possible by two great converging forces that began near the middle of the last century: the civil rights revolution and the changes engendered by the Immigration Act of 1965. The civil rights movement led to the rapid dismantling of Jim Crow and the inclusion of black Americans in politics, the military, the middle class and popular culture. The 1965 immigration act set in motion vast demographic and social changes that have altered the nation’s ethno-racial landscape.” Again, the association of the two reforms seems to miss the restrictive side of the 1965 legislation.

⁷⁹ The use of undocumented labor goes back to the already ambiguous restrictions of the 1920s. Zolberg explains: “Even as they restricted the ‘new immigration’ nearly to the point of extinction, the legislators

legal status is the most striking difference between historical and current immigration. In Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, for instance, the abuse Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis Rudkos goes through is less surprising for the present reader than the strange afternoon when an operative from the Chicago political machine picks him up from work and has him sign up for citizenship in no more than two hours ([1906] 2003). Today, in contrast, between one fourth and one third of the foreign-born are undocumented, and an unknown but significant portion of legal residents and naturalized citizens were undocumented in the past.⁸⁰

Lack of legal status plays an important if ambiguous role in shaping the migrant's orientation to time. Illegality makes immigrant life notoriously difficult. Even when labor rights apply regardless of status, violations are more frequent when workers are undocumented.⁸¹ Interactions with civil servants, health professionals, or police officers are stressful; it is never entirely clear what one can and cannot do. There is a general precariousness to undocumented life. Migrants never know when they will be caught; any time someone knocks on the door may be the last.

acting on behalf of the 'original American stock' refrained from closing the country's back door, in full knowledge that it allowed for a growing stream of Mexicans who, by their own racial standards, were more objectionable than southern and eastern Europeans because they were for the most part not even 'white.' The emerging distinction between a main gate tightly regulated in keeping with the 'national interest,' as determined by the guardians of the country's 'Nordic' character, and an informally managed 'back door' where agricultural employers ruled supreme, was thus institutionalized into a long-lasting feature of American immigration policy" (2006: 245).

⁸⁰ Unless one is granted refugee status, there are few possibilities to gain legal residency in the United States other than employment visas for highly qualified personnel and family reunification visas. As a consequence, it is very unlikely that labor migrants without immediate relatives in the country have legal status from the beginning. That is why many of the current legal residents and naturalized citizens were undocumented in the past, including those who received legal status after the last large regularization in 1986, but also those who gained legal status by other means (most commonly marriage). I have not found any estimates of the proportion of foreign-born who have documents now but were undocumented in the past.

⁸¹ A recent report on "Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers" (Bernhardt, Milkman, et al. 2009) in the low-wage labor markets of New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles finds the following rates for minimum-wage and overtime violations: minimum-wage violations for authorized immigrants 21.3% and for unauthorized immigrants 37.1% (42); overtime violations for authorized immigrants 67.2% and for unauthorized immigrants 84.9% (44).

As much as illegality pushes migrants to go back home, however, it also pushes them to stay longer. Not having papers makes it difficult to settle, but also to go away. The obstacles to entering the country illegally are significant. Tougher border enforcement translates into more expensive clandestine journeys, and thus more time is needed to pay off debts. Once immigrants are in the country, moreover, they know how costly and risky it is to get back in. As Douglas Massey has demonstrated, restrictive immigration policies can have unintended consequences: the more difficult they make it for immigrants to come in, the less likely immigrants are to go back (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Massey 2006).

And then there is the hope. As politicians keep promising immigration reform, the possibility of legalization is always around the corner.⁸² This makes it tempting to wait. And, more importantly, the regularization of status provides something to look forward to. Immigrant life is mentally divided between before and after obtaining the papers. The hope of legalization creates another opportunity: once I have my papers, immigrants keep thinking, things will finally change.⁸³

⁸² There was an important attempt to pass an “immigration reform” with vast regularization provisions in 2007. President Obama promised immigration reform during the 2008 campaign. Representative Luis Guterrez introduced a new bill in the House in late 2009 (Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America’s Security and Prosperity—CIR-ASAP). A look at the covers of *El Diario/La Prensa*, the main Spanish-speaking language newspapers in the New York City area, reveals that immigration reform has been “announced” at least every three or four months over the 2008-2010 period.

⁸³ An amnesty or legalization program is only one way to regularize one’s status. Marrying an American citizen can help, and there are other possibilities. Once legal residency is obtained, however, the law creates incentives for the immigrant to stay. Residency can be lost if the migrant spends more than six months outside the United States, and there are few possibilities other than residency for foreigners to enter and stay in the country legally. American immigration policy and discourse have long been hostile to “temporary” immigrants. Zolberg writes about the campaign against the “new immigration” that would result in the 1920s shutdown: “[A] distinctive negative was now added: the newcomers were mostly single men who hoarded their meager earnings and returned to Europe within four or five years, with no intention of becoming U.S. citizens. The issue was thus not only contracts, but also that they were *sojourners* rather than *immigrants*, a status that rendered them similar to Chinese coolies whom the United States had already excluded” (2006: 195-6). Wyman writes: “The basis of American nativism was not opposition to return migration, but it gained several major arguments in the course of reacting to temporary immigrants. Nativists began to erupt in anger as thousands and thousands of short-term residents avoided assimilation and escaped abroad with their American earnings” (1993: 205).

The lack of legal status, in sum, heightens the temporal contradictions in the immigrant experience. Immigrants with no papers are always in transit, and yet there are reasons why it is difficult for them to leave. One factor is the greater costs already invested; another is the prospect of obtaining legal papers, perpetually renewing the hope. But there is something else. Undocumented immigrants are said to hide, but they actually hide in plain sight, or half-hide. They are not supposed to be here, but everyone knows they are. The bizarre ambiguity of their unresolved condition creates confusion—one day you can be deported, next day you can be legalized.⁸⁴ In so unstable a situation, with so much change in the air, undocumented immigrants wait.

None of the three conditions described—leaving, falling, hiding—seems particularly consequential in the short-term. As migration begins to last too long, however, they start making their dent. The three contribute to clouding the immigrant's horizon. Leaving—and the distance and isolation that ensue—deprives immigrants of their original sense of direction. Falling—downward social mobility—pushes them away from the frame of reference they knew. Hiding—or the more pervasive half-hiding—creates an ambiguous situation where no one knows what to expect. Goals are mixed up and plans get lost. Confusion takes over and decisions cannot be made.⁸⁵ Like the friendless *homo economicus*, migrants focus on working as

⁸⁴ This is not entirely different from what Cecilia Menjivar (2006) captures with the concept of “liminal legality” for the case of Salvadorans and Guatemalans; I suggest that the idea can be extended to all undocumented immigrants.

⁸⁵ A “sociology of waiting” must be part of the broader sociology of time. Robert K. Merton (1984) reconstructs the concept of “socially expected duration,” or SED, tracing it back to Durkheim’s work on the social origins of the category of time in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). SEDs are “socially prescribed or collectively patterned expectations about temporal durations imbedded in social structures of various kinds” (Merton 1984: 265-6). Meetings or movies, for instance, are expected to last a certain time, and there is a certain length of time that individuals are permitted to occupy certain socially-defined roles (such as president, or student). Duration, in a word, is heavily—formally or informally—regulated, even if SEDs must be distinguished from actual durations (266). Migration is also expected to last a certain time—it is expected to be temporary. But who, exactly, expects migration to be temporary? Duration, in Merton’s discussion, is a property of a certain social structure (an organization, a group, a relationship). Migrants’ original plans contain “expectations about temporal duration” that are “imbedded in social structures of various kinds.” But once migrants leave, once they step into “another social dimension” (Shuetz’s words), the SED of migration has no framework to enforce it (or the framework is weaker). Merton draws from a study of unemployment in Austria to

much as possible, day in and day out. The future becomes difficult to organize, and waiting is all that is left.⁸⁶

V. Socio-Biography of Immigration

Not everyone comes from the same origin or leaves under the same circumstances. Hierarchies vary and so do the social positions within them. Some immigrants are new to physical labor, some are not. Not having documents will impact people differently depending on the type of relationship to the law they had before emigrating. Immigration changes immigrants, and that is a significant factor in understanding why they often stay longer than planned—but the changes will depend on where immigrants come from.

Socio-biographical methodology can be valuable for studying how the past shapes the present and future in immigrant life. The popularity of the biographical genre has been linked to the cult of the individual in the United States, and that is one reason why sociologists resist the approach.⁸⁷ Yet socio-biography proceeds very

discuss the anomic effects of unlimited time (272). The migrant's time is not unlimited, but once the SED of migration is overstayed, once the migrant stays beyond the original plan, the *social* organization of time starts to get lost—and time goes by. Bryan Roberts (1995) uses Merton's concept of SED to think about immigration in the United States. The author focuses mostly on immigrant national groups (such as Mexicans) and discusses how their temporal orientation impacts their internal "cohesion" and their "success or failure"; toward the end of the chapter Roberts writes: "There is, in fact, a sense in which Mexican immigration to the United States has gotten all its timings wrong. The country *par excellence* of temporary migration had the misfortune of sharing a border with the country *par excellence* of permanent immigration" (78). Roberts acknowledges that "Individualized migration," meaning individuals who migrate "without being part of a group response," and who are often of urban origin, has "always been present in the history of immigration to the United States . . . and [it] is likely to have become more important in the contemporary period even among groups, such as Mexicans, whose past migration has been heavily based on networks." But the author discusses "individualized migration" only in passing: its "full analysis requires more attention than is possible within the scope of this chapter" (47).

⁸⁶ Richard Swedberg's (2005) conceptualization of (interested) action by means of the sign-post analogy is helpful to picture *non*-decision-making as well. It is a common critique of economic models to say that people often take action without calculating; by reminding us of the physicality of action, Swedberg's analogy shows that the opposite may also be true: people calculate without taking action. Migrants keep making plans for the future: their bodies stay where they are. The question is: what are the conditions making the "awareness and freedom" (98) of an interested action possible?

⁸⁷ British biographer Nigel Hamilton (2007) writes about the history of the biographical genre in the English-speaking world.

differently from the traditional biographical genre, even when borrowing some of its tools. The individual, for one, is painted in less flattering colors, as the social landscape is emphasized; secondly, socio-biographies concentrate on individual cases insofar as they provide useful material to craft general ideal types. In this section I discuss the potential of the socio-biographical method in the area of migration, seeking to update a research tradition that stretches far back in the history of sociology.

Who were the European emigrants before they stepped off the boat? *The Uprooted* ([1951] 1973) presented one of the most influential types: peasants who had lived in the “imperturbable sameness” (7) of the old society for centuries. Then the “elements of the old equilibrium disintegrated” (22) and men grew up for whom “there was no longer room within the constricted acreage of the village” (24). The peasants’ sons could not ignore the end of an era and the bleak prospects ahead: “when even to stay meant to change,” Handlin writes, “they had to leave” (22).

The type synthesizes long historical processes into single lives, and the distance between father and son stands for vast structural changes. The sociological imagination captures the history of the European peasants-turned-emigrants as a class—but not necessarily the emigrant’s individual trajectory. The author himself, in fact, describes several phases between the “imperturbable sameness” and the final moment when “they had to leave.” Internal migration, for instance, often preceded transatlantic migration, with peasants venturing “in ever-wider circles away from the home” (25). As the long nineteenth century unfolded, not everyone confronted the collapse of the old equilibrium at the same stage.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ This is a common critique of Handlin’s *The Uprooted* among more empirically-oriented historians such as Rudolph Vecoli (1964). Hasia Diner (2008) reviews the historical literature on immigration and writes: “The avoidance of theory in the field of American immigration history can also be set against the backdrop of an ironic intellectual legacy on the matter of grand overarching theory. The first truly big and notable book in the field of immigration history, Oscar Handlin’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Uprooted* (1951), projected a theory of sorts [and it] might be said to have launched the scholarly enterprise of the history of immigration in the United States . . . For decades beyond the book’s publication, scholars sought to chip away at it . . . By building their intellectual enterprise against a

The group portrayal of *The Uprooted* can be contrasted with an individual sociological biography: that of immigrant Wladek Wiszniewski as presented by W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in volume III of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1919).⁸⁹ At 310 pages in length, Wladek's life-record starts off with his childhood in Poland and goes up to his first two years in Chicago when he is around 30 years old (in 1913-14). Wladek writes in the first person, with Thomas and Znaniecki commenting in some 230 footnotes.⁹⁰ The focus is on the emigrant's life before emigration: the United States does not show up in the document until page 274 out of 310, and Wladek does not leave Europe until page 294 out of 310 (1919: 364 and 384).

The difference between *The Uprooted* ideal type and *The Polish Peasant* ideal type—as personified by Wladek Wiszniewski—is that the latter is built on a more human scale. It is not a question of detail or representativeness: both are helpful ideal

theory and against *the* theory that created the field, immigration and ethnic historians have instead embraced a way of thinking that claims that every historical negotiation, the experience of every group, must be told in its own context and in terms of its specificities of time and place” (43-4).

⁸⁹ Wladek himself narrates the origin of this collaboration toward the end of his testimony. He was out of work and the Chicago winter was approaching when an ad in the *Dziennik Chicagoski* offered to buy letters from the old country at 10 to 15 cents each. “I had some thirty letters and resolved to sell them in order to buy bread,” Wladek says. By the end of November Wladek got work in the stockyards, but the pay was too low, and his wife was pregnant. “Then I wrote a letter to Dr. Z., asking him about the address of a hospital and complaining that I had nothing to live on. I soon received an answer. Dr. Z. gave me the addresses of three hospitals and wrote me at the same time that if I wanted to earn a few dollars I could describe my life, sending first a few sheets to try. Of course I set to work immediately, wrote five sheets and sent them, waiting for the results. Soon I received a letter asking me to come. Dr. Z. told me that he was satisfied with what I had written and promised to give me \$30 for two hundred sheets. I was awfully glad, for now I needed money very much. I began to work earnestly and slept little at night but wrote continually, except when I had to go to my work in the stockyards” (397).

⁹⁰ This is a typical footnote: “Just before the fall of Poland the aristocracy amused itself as never before or after, and the tradition of entertainment influenced the lower classes. But this attitude never influenced Wladek. He seldom treats, even later in life. During his apprenticeship and wandering he associated mainly with people who could more easily treat him, and their action found favorable ground in his essential egotism” (105). Another one: “The episode lacks all the social and moral elements. It is not regulated by the traditional norms of marriage; it does not reach the level of romantic love which, even in the simple form existing between Dora and Wladek, is a basis of a certain life-organization; as a mere flirtation for provoking response it goes too far. Mania has no interest in it. Wladek does not try to repeat it” (210). And one more: “The visit and dance put for the first time before Wladek's eyes in a clear form the social advance achieved by his family, including himself. The situation is thus defined for him, and from this moment envy to some extent gives place to familial pride” (362).

types. But *The Uprooted* injects history into people, sometimes making them look like puppets. The biographical method allows Thomas and Znaniecki to model the interaction between structural transformations and individual lives more subtly. The authors read history in Wladek's life without having Wladek speak history. They are more open to the lags and contradictions between historical and individual time; and more aware of the opacity of history to its contemporaries.⁹¹

C. Wright Mills described the sociological imagination as the capacity to unveil the connections between biography and history ([1959] 1978: 6). Both the group portrayal in *The Uprooted* and the socio- biography of Wladek Wiszniewski seek to reveal such connections. But the biography of Wladek provides better insights because it finds the traces of history deep (or at least deeper) in the individual's mind; history, so to speak, is not one single and articulate script but many different voices whispering in our head. And what matters to Thomas and Znaniecki is Wladek's head: his changing definitions of the situation, or, in other words, how he thinks. The question, to the authors, is not what Wladek does but why he does it.⁹²

Recent developments in sociological theory seek to bring the individual to the front. As institutions fail to organize people's lives meaningfully, Danilo Martuccelli and Francois de Singly (2009) argue, sociologists (at least some of them) must move from studying what institutions do to individuals to studying what individuals do to

⁹¹ There are several intermediate possibilities between Handlin's historical narrative and *The Polish Peasant's* biographical approach (it should also be said that the distinction between these two is not always clear, given that Handlin drew from Chicago-era biographical materials). One is the collective biography, or "prosopography" (Stone 1971), of which Merton's study of science in England (1938) is an example in sociology. Unlike more general narratives, collective biographies pay attention to individual as opposed to historical time, rooting the narrative in the experience of particular generations. Unlike individual biographies, collective approaches cannot describe as carefully how individuals experience history. In writing about the sociology of work and occupations, Andrew Abbott (2005) calls attention to "workers' life courses," emphasizing the cohort as analytical unit (310); this approach could also be useful for exploring the migrants' past.

⁹² In Weber's terms, not action but orientation to action. Weber writes in chapter 1 of *Economy and Society*: "Thus for a science which is concerned with the subjective meaning of action, explanation requires a grasp of the complex of meaning in which an actual course of understandable action thus interpreted belongs" ([1922] 1978: 9).

themselves (51). This is not to say that institutions—families, networks, organizations, laws—are not central to the individual’s life. Yet too often sociology disregards the varied forms in which individuals find their way around such institutions, not so much challenging as redefining them in their mind. Modern individuals, the authors argue, must make sense of their own trajectories—institutions will not do it for them. And migrants, in this sense, have always been particularly modern. As they throw themselves out in the open, migrants are soon on their own, and it takes much work to redefine who they are and what they want.⁹³

In the field of migration studies, more particularly, the use of biographical material is necessary to explore the void between the emigrant who leaves and the immigrant who arrives; it is one of the few ways to connect the dots between the sending and receiving social structures, and to examine social mobility as it takes place across borders. By taking immigrants’ lives as analytical units, the researcher can identify the continuities throughout the immigrant’s experience, preserving the connecting tissue between the different periods and thus capturing the change. The point in socio-biographical methodology, it should be clear, is not to substitute more real people for more abstract types: the point is to build better types—ideal types that register some of the complex interaction between migration and the flowing of time, including rapids, meanders, and swamps.⁹⁴

⁹³ Sociology, more generally, has long struggled to conceptualize the individual. Attempting to rescue the “oversocialized” individual from the gears of structural-functionalism, Dennis Wrong (1961) refers to the biographical method, going all the way back from the 1960s to John Dollard’s 1935 *Criteria for the Life History* (Wrong 1961: 192). Individuals are more present in sociological theory today than they were in the 1960s, but often reduced to excessively simplified entities (not too different from the *homo economicus*). The new sociology of the individual in France argues persuasively that individuals should not be incorporated into sociological theory only for the sake of model-building (Martuccelli and de Singly 2009: 33).

⁹⁴ As shown by Thomas and Znaniecki’s work, biographical research is not new in sociology, and the use of “life histories” was central to the Chicago school (Platt 1994). John Dollard’s just mentioned *Criteria for the Life History* (1935) describes the life history as “a deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it,” and specifies what “an adequate life history document” must look like (2-3). Most of the seven criteria for the proper life-history focus on emphasizing the weight of society (“the subject must be viewed as a specimen in a

In discussing ethnographic methods to study migration, David Fitzgerald (2006) calls for research to include both sending and receiving areas, following the migrants as they travel between localities (3). Multi-sited ethnographies, Fitzgerald argues, can help reveal the “full scope of the migration experience and its impact” (2). Does the author refer to following particular migrants or groups of migrants in general? The problem with the first strategy is that the time-frame of migration tends to be longer than the time-frame of research. The problem with the second strategy is that different sites will reveal the experience of different migrants; the “full scope of the migration experience and its impact” will thus be presented by assembling pieces that belong to different experiences.

The socio-biographical method offers an alternative understanding of multi-sited ethnography. The different sites, so to speak, are all in the migrant’s mind. Instead of following different migrants as they travel from one place to the other, it is possible to follow an individual migrant throughout his or her experience.⁹⁵ This approach requires less traveling to other countries, and more traveling through the cavernous layers of immigrant memory (which is also multi-sited).⁹⁶ The main advantage lies in reconstructing the continuities between different sites, typically the sending and receiving area. The missing links between life back home and life in the

cultural series” or “the ‘social situation’ must be carefully and continuously specified as a factor”; but there is also a reference to the family: “the continuous related character of experience from childhood through adulthood must be stressed” [8]). One of the most famous biographical studies associated with the Chicago school is Clifford Shaw’s (1930) *The Jack-Roller* (Platt 1996: 46), a study of “deviant” behavior (immigration, in this sense, was also seen as deviant behavior). While life-history methodology declined in the 1950s and 1960s as survey interviewing became dominant, it came back to life in the 1970s, as sociology “increasingly began reexamining the work of the Chicago School, leading to a veritable boom in interpretative biographical research” (Rosenthal 2004: 48).

⁹⁵ To focus on the individual does not mean that the individual is seen as an isolated unit. As mentioned above, an important difference between the socio-biographical method and conventional individual biographies is that the former seeks to illuminate the social context; individuals are seen through their relationships with other individuals (Granovetter [1992b] discusses the concept of “relational embeddedness”). On the other hand, economic sociology sometimes approaches embeddedness more as an assumption than a variable. By following the individual through different context, socio-biographies make it possible to identify varying degrees of isolation/embeddedness.

⁹⁶ Fitzgerald (2006) refers several times to *The Polish Peasant* but not to life-histories, even though Thomas and Znaniecki made their esteem for this approach quite explicit ([1918-1920] 1958: 1832-3).

new country cannot be reconstructed by visiting multiple sites and talking to different migrants; the missing links are hidden in memory.⁹⁷

By reconstructing the migrant's past, and comparing it to the present, the socio-biographical method makes it possible to study change. But how do biographies capture change? Can the biographer ask the migrants themselves whether or how they have changed? Thomas and Znaniecki deal with the problem in one of their notes: "It is an interesting character of this autobiography that the author [Wladek] does not occupy any consistent standpoint in writing it, but enters unconsciously into the spirit of every period of his life as he describes it, and occupies again all the standpoints that he has successively occupied" (1919: 300). Wladek, according to the authors, describes each period of his life as if he were presently living it; his current viewpoint does not alter his reconstruction of the past, thus making change very visible.

Whether or not that is the case with Wladek, it seems unlikely that the migrants' present will not shape their accounts of the past. So how do biographies work? If the perception of life changes when life changes, how can we tell the difference between the present and the past? A biography always faces the risk of teleology, or the use of the present to account for the past. Migrants, when pushed to narrate their life, may seek to reorganize their past in order to explain their present, not

⁹⁷ The study of memory is an important subfield in sociology. Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins (2008) refer to social memory studies as "a general rubric for inquiry into the varieties of forms through which we are shaped by the past, conscious and unconscious, public and private, material and communicative, consensual and challenged" (112). Most of the work they review is oriented to collective rather than individual memory, although the distinction is often blurry. The authors link the interest in the past to modernity; they quote historians such as Hobsbawm: "Paradoxically, the past remains the most useful analytical tool for coping with constant change" (115-6); Schieder: "historical thought served a compensating function making up for the actual loss of history by exaggerating a consciousness of it" (116); and Nora: "We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left" (120-1). A parallel can be drawn between modernity's "constant change" and its interest in the past, on one hand, and the migrants' changing circumstances and their own attention to the past, on the other. Like modernity, the migrant is future- and past- oriented at once. In discussing possible directions for research in the field of social memory, the authors emphasize the connections between memory and both collective and individual identity: "Inquiries into identity and memory are being related; these research programs, we hope, will illuminate further how, when, and why individuals and groups turn towards their past" (133). This is an extremely important question for the sociology of migration.

recognizing deviations or change. By distinguishing between life-histories as a source of information and life-histories as “a social construct of social reality in themselves,” the literature on life-history research suggests the way out (Rosenthal 2004: 48).⁹⁸

A socio-biography, briefly put, must combine the two approaches. On the one hand, the migrant’s account must be used to reconstruct the migrant’s world—not only his or her life—in order to compare it with the present; this adds “objectivity” as the researcher establishes some aspect of the story to reveal something that the migrant is not saying (the risk is to take too much distance from the individual and substitute pre-cooked sociological pictures for the actual case). On the other hand, the narrative must be examined in itself, as different ways of telling—pauses, confusions, repetitions—can hint at narrative fissures. Both as a source of information and as a “social construct,” the sociologist must approach the life-history skeptically, forcing “sociological space” between the migrant’s words and the migrant’s life.⁹⁹

Socio-biographies can help identify change—but who were the emigrants before leaving? By working with biographical material, *The Polish Peasant* captures the disorder preceding emigration better than other accounts. The Wladek ideal type emphasizes the disorganization of life. This “Polish peasant,” to begin with, is not exactly a peasant: “Wladek and his family are of peasant origin, but no longer belong to a peasant community” (1919: 83). Because “No definite social place can be

⁹⁸ For methodological literature on socio-biographical research: in addition to Rosenthal 2004, see Bertaux 1981, Bertaux and Kohli 1984, Denzin 1989, Linde 1993, Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wenfrag 2001, Atkinson 1998 and 2001. The distinction between the life-story as “information” and the life-story as “social construction” is central to the field of oral history. Labor historian Daniel James writes: “The form of oral narrative is often taken now to be as significant as the content” (2001: 123). And he quotes oral historian Alessandro Portelli: “The oral sources used in this essay are not always fully reliable in point of fact. Rather than being a weakness, this is, however, their strength: errors, inventions and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meanings” (quoted in James 2001: 124).

⁹⁹ The migrant’s life, in this context, is the sociologist’s words. The migrant will not recognize him or herself in the sociologist’s words. Wladek wrote his own autobiography, but he would have not recognized himself in Thomas and Znaniecki’s analytical footnotes. The distance between the sociologist’s and the migrant’s interpretation creates theoretical and ethical problems. Other methodological approaches, however, are even less respectful of their cases, submitting them to impersonal experiments or manipulating them statistically (Abbott [2001] writes about how cases are [mis]treated in American sociology—though more from an epistemological than ethical perspective).

assigned to the Wiszniewskis in the old class-system,” Wladek’s prospects are always uncertain. For years Wladek wanders from one place to the other, at some point emigrating to Germany and later serving with the Russian army.¹⁰⁰ Either because of internal migration or other forms of distance, Wladek is an emigrant long before becoming one.¹⁰¹ *The Uprooted* says that even to stay meant to change, and that is

¹⁰⁰ To be on the road is not easy: “I had been ten weeks on the journey without finding any work, and I had no idea how long I should still be obliged to tramp about the world, and where was the end toward which I was going” (246-7). And Wladek resents his family: “But what do they care, even relatives, if their own brother suffers there, in the far world, hunger and misery, provided they don’t feel it themselves?” (241). Wladek feels obliged to tramp “about the world” and suffers there “in the far world” years before leaving for Chicago. The short time he spends in Germany, for instance, seems more of an immigrant-like experience than anything he mentions about Chicago. For starters, Wladek buys someone else’s passport to get into Germany (or Prussia, as he says), and thus is forced to go by a different name. Second, the new conditions are difficult to endure, and he feels ashamed: “I wrote letters to my family and I received answer from them to my assumed name. They were greatly astonished that I was working on a farm, but what could they do? I did not write anywhere to my acquaintances, for I did not want them to know that I was in Prussia, for I was awfully ashamed that I had to work as a *parobek*” (282-3). As mentioned above, Max Weber wrote about the Polish laborers in Germany, but several years before Wladek’s sojourn.

¹⁰¹ One of Wladek’s sisters was already in Chicago: “She had no opportunity to marry suitably, old spinsterhood awaited her, so she went across the ocean in search of a husband” (362). When the opportunity to travel arises, it does not take “wandering” Wladek much time to make up his mind. Some of his brothers try to stop him: one offers to lend him “200 roubles more, so that you may not have to go to America” (378), and tells him “it is inhuman to drive one of us beyond the sea” (380). Wladek is decided: “Perhaps there, beyond the water, I shall earn enough for my own bakery. Then I will come back, and if I don’t earn, I won’t come” (378). One of his girlfriends “regretted much my going away and put to me the same question as [my brother] Pawel: Don’t you regret leaving your family and your country?”—“I do,” I answered, “but everything must be done for money” (382). Thomas and Znaniecki comment: “The rapid decision not to accept the [200 roubles] shows that other than merely rational considerations are at work. We have more than once seen the same unwillingness to stay in the old conditions when the decision to change them had been reached; the attraction of the unknown then makes the known particularly unattractive” (379). This is Wladek’s last day: “When I returned the horses were waiting. I ate the breakfast and began to bid my family goodbye. But who can describe this separation, full of tears? Mother hung herself upon my neck, as if she did not expect to see me anymore. . . . I began to cry much, but the driver tried to comfort me, so I mustered my courage and crossed myself” (383). His sister meets him in Chicago: “You must know that in America everybody lives for himself. I gave you food without your paying for only one week, but after that you must pay \$15 a month” (385). The economy is bad and Wladek is often out of work. He gets married with a girl he knew from Poland. “We don’t go now to her uncles, for we have neither clothes nor money, and nobody cares for poor people. From time to time we see my sister and brother in law. Brother-in-law sometimes tries to comfort us, but sister . . . always says something painful to my wife” (400). And these are Wladek’s final words: “Thus I have improved my lot in this America which our immigrants adore!” (400).

why the peasants decided to leave. The Wladek type says that the peasants left because they had already changed.¹⁰²

Immigration is easier to study than emigration, Abdelmalek Sayad (2004) argues, because immigrants are present while emigrants are absent. The sociology of immigration often studies the immigrants' background with the categories of the receiving society (human capital, job skills, legal status).¹⁰³ A sociology of emigration (in Sayad's words, a "science of absence") must study the empty spaces the emigrants leave behind. In searching the emigrants' memory for the persons they were before leaving, the socio-biographical method can help reconstruct the absence behind each immigrant's presence and the presence behind each immigrant's absence.

VI. Types and Cases

Like immigration museums, immigration theory collects artifacts and documents and organizes them into different areas or types. Unlike immigration museums, theory deals with the present along with the past; theory is a museum of the present, even if—like museums of "contemporary" art—it is always lagging behind. What are the floors and sections of the American immigration museum? How is this enormous collection organized? What does the great typology of immigration look like? And what to do

¹⁰² Anomic emigration is the modern type of emigration; its origins lie in structural transformations and the consequent disorganization of life. Historian Frank Thistlethwaite ([1960] 1991) writes: "Emigration was, in fact, intimately connected with that quickening of communications, markets, commerce and capital which, in the 1840s and 1850s in Scandinavia, the 1880s and 1890s in Italy, was the first phase of the establishment of a modern economy. This erosion of the customary community by commercial forces was an essential precondition to migration; it caused a revolutionary increase in social mobility which both job and travel opportunities transformed into a propensity to migrate. Migration was, in fact, an aspect of social mobility" (38). More recently, Saskia Sassen (1988) connects the expansion of modern forms of production to the increase and feminization of migration in the two decades after 1965. The continuities between internal and international migration have often been noted in the literature, particularly in the step-migration model. In Latin America, internal migration used to be one of the central topics of sociology, often seen in light of the modernization paradigm dominant in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹⁰³ Some of these categories mirror the categories of immigration law and policy (Bourdieu 2004). Other categories—most clearly race and gender, but also social capital—mirror mainstream approaches in American sociology.

when—as in the recent *Night at the Museum* movie—the pieces wake up at night, walk out of their cases, and happily change rooms?

Immigration (emigration) can be classified in myriad ways, but the categories tend to be blurry or quickly obsolete. The old attempts to divide immigrants into permanent and temporary have largely vanished from studies of immigration in the United States. Some European typologies point to the type of network in which migration takes places, interestingly classifying migration careers into atomistic, volume-based, and structured (Cvajner and Sciortino 2009).¹⁰⁴ Most American taxonomies simply reproduce the categories in immigration law: employer-sponsored immigrants, entrepreneurs, family reunifications, refugees and asylees, and, of course, the large mass actually bypassing the law. These types are often overlapped with the immigrants' background, mostly education level or some other skill (or, in Portes and Rumbaut's terms, "human capital" [2006: 21]).

I follow these classifications but try to take them one step further. First, I suggest bringing back to life the distinction between temporary and permanent, though not as a factual distinction but rather as one of the sources of tension in the immigration experience (in Sayad's words, the temporary that lasts). Second, I suggest moving the background typology beyond education or skills. Following work by Saskia Sassen (1988) and many others, the emigrant's background must be classified sociologically, not only demographically; the task is to look into the social hierarchies immigrants come from, reexamining the old notions of disorganization and anomie (among several other possibilities).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ The authors call atomistic "those migratory trajectories that are defined by a sequence of separate (and often disparate) steps triggered frequently by unexpected combinations of factors accounted for in terms of individual contingencies"; volume-based careers refer to migration taking place "within the context of sudden, large-scale flows of irregular migrants, often developing over a short period of time"; structured careers occur "within irregular migratory systems that have a long and established history and function on the basis of a well-established infrastructure" (Cvajner and Sciortino 2009).

¹⁰⁵ There are many studies carefully examining the social structures where immigrants come from (one example is Grasmuck and Pessar 1991 on Dominicans). More generally and tentatively, the connection

My plan is to bring together the time-orientation and the background typologies. In *Birds of Passage*, Michael Piore carefully crafted the temporary migrant type. As time goes by and the meaning of “temporary” gets lost, I advance an approach to understanding the longer stays that takes the immigrant’s background—captured socio-biographically—as its point of departure. The different ways in which immigrants survive the conditions of immigrant life, I argue, depend on who they were—sociologically—before emigration. Every immigrant *leaves*, most *fall*, and many *hide*, or half-hide; but the impact of the changes varies by social origin and trajectory.

The three chapters in Part One explore the former and present worlds of Ecuadorian immigrant Arturo Gómez and his family. The three chapters in Part Two explore the former and present worlds of Ecuadorian immigrant Julio Colarejo and his family. The two cases are similar and different. The Gómez’ come from the Ecuadorian coast, the Colarejos from the Ecuadorian highlands. The Gómez’ lean to the right, the Colarejos to the left. Emigration caught the Gómez’ on their way down the social hierarchy, and the Colarejos on their way up. But the two families have much in common as they face up to new and uncertain circumstances. Together the two cases afford valuable material to examine the immigrant interaction between past and present—as time goes by.

The cases are not isolated. In both the material I choose to present and my interpretations of it there are visible traces of my 18 months of fieldwork in Queens (New York City). As described in the introduction, I talked to dozens of immigrants and conducted many interviews, and I spent much time at community organizations and immigrants’ houses, in addition to volunteer work at a hospital, with immigrants

between social conditions in the sending country and emigration can be discussed with the help of Durkheim’s typology of suicide ([1897] 1979). To emigrate and to commit suicide are obviously not the same. But the two can be seen as ways out of situations in which the “equilibrium” between the group and the individual has been lost.

in detention, and at the Workers' Compensation Board in Jamaica (Queens). The entire fieldwork, which I designed to maximize exposure to the immigrant world and language, informs every aspect of the chapters, even when not explicitly acknowledged. On the other hand, I make no claim to representativeness in the sense that my cases are the dominant immigrant experience, even if I try to put them in context and contrast them with other cases as much as possible. As Michael Burawoy has compellingly argued in discussing case methodology, different models of science have different priorities: "We do not worry about the uniqueness of our case since we are not as interested in its representativeness as its contribution to reconstructing theory" (2009: 43). My goal is to contribute to immigration theory—which I see as an open and changing typology—by helping to build richer and more accurate ideal types.¹⁰⁶

As much as I try to walk the readers gently through the immigrant underworld, there will be moments when they might feel lost. Why is he telling me this? What is

¹⁰⁶ David Fitzgerald (2006) distances himself from Burawoy's "extended case method" and his suggestion to pay more attention to "societal significance" than "statistical significance" (Burawoy 1991 quoted in Fitzgerald 2006: 15). Fitzgerald offers three strategies to amend Burawoy's approach and assess representativeness: "The first is collaboration via contemporaneous or serial ethnographies that capture a greater range of variation than is possible in one researcher's project . . . The second strategy is using existing statistics to assess the degree of representativeness of a case, as ethnographers often do using census data . . . The third is combining ethnographic and survey evidence gathered either on one's own or in collaboration" (15-6). In my view the three are good suggestions, and I try to follow them when possible. On the other hand, the suggestions hint at an understanding of "significance" that is problematic. "The question still remains," writes Fitzgerald, "how ethnographers know if what they find are just 'outliers' on the great graph of social life" (15). My starting point is different. My cases are useful not because they are more or less representative; they are useful because they help me contribute to the building of a typology. Sociologists do care about finding more or less regular patterns—but both Weber and Durkheim constructed theory *typologically*. More generally, Fitzgerald's suggestion to assess representativeness does not seem to take into account that different research questions will make the task more or less difficult. To insist on the need to assess representativeness *regardless* of the type of research question ignores the possibility that some research questions require in-depth research. In discussing case methodology, Andrew Abbott (2001) argues that "we can and should disentangle the population/case distinction from the analytic/narrative one" (159); it should be possible to move away from population/analytic studies dealing "so poorly with the activity and ontology of cases" while also finding ways "to create narrative generalizations across cases" (159). As Abbott himself acknowledges, though, it is not clear yet how this can work in practice. There does seem to be a bit of a trade-off between different methodological approaches, and the researcher must choose according to his or her questions.

the point of the details? There are reasons for every bit of material I include, but the reader will at times have to trust me and be patient. There is a necessary gap between the language of immigration and the language of sociology. The chapters are documents of my encounter with Ecuadorian Queens; they are based on recorded interviews and field notes. The translation into English and academic rhetoric must be slow and sometimes ambiguous for some of the original texture to be preserved.

This is a sociological study of immigrant life; I present and analyze my cases from the perspective of sociology. But here and there I would also want to share something else. Joseph Conrad, in one of his prologues, describes what literature is about: “To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time . . . to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes . . . to show its vibration, its color, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its color, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment” (1914 [1962]: 21). Sociology, of course, is not literature. Yet I still hope to follow Andrew Abbott’s (2007) call for a “lyrical sociology” and capture some of the poetry of courage in immigrant life.

PART ONE:

HAY GENTE QUE NO SABE DE DONDE VIENE UNO
[SOME PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU COME FROM]

CHAPTER TWO:

EN ESTE PAIS TIENES QUE ANDAR CON LA MENTIRA
[IN THIS COUNTRY YOU HAVE TO GO AROUND LYING]

I will call him Arturo Gómez. I met him at an immigrant community organization in Queens where we attended meetings and other events. In November 2007 the organization called several people to work, including the two of us, and so we met. The job was three days a week for five weeks at \$11 an hour. We had to pick up lists of names and addresses from the office and go around the area knocking on doors and talking to people about the upcoming elections and the benefits of joining the organization. Ideally we were expected to recruit new members, or get their phone numbers; someone else would eventually call them. It was freezing cold; it hurt to take off your gloves to look through the sheets on the clipboard or write something down. The streets were almost empty, except for the crowds periodically ejected from the No. 7 train, suddenly turning up and suddenly disappearing, briskly walking away. We worked between 5 and 9 in the evening to find people at home; everyone was tired and often eating dinner. I think we recruited no one and got very few numbers.

Arturo appeared to take it well, or not to care. “Work is work,” his eyes seemed to say. I could not help complaining. After completing our rounds we would all meet back in the office and usually have pizza or some other food. After hours out in the cold, hot food was scrumptious, and never enough. I craved the food and struggled not to eat more than my share. Arturo showed more restraint, eating but not looking at the food. It was common for him to get back to the office late. We wondered why and began to find it funny, possibly because he was older and sometimes looked absent-minded or confused. It was just that he took his job seriously and often got carried away, or so it seemed. While eating we had to fill out report

forms with the information from our contact lists. He was thorough: his own codes, different colors, little notes in careful handwriting, extra copies of everything; and yet the instructions were unclear and he frequently got lost.

I remember my first impressions of him. He wore an old-style driving cap and walked with a cane, not unlike a well-dressed yet unassuming grandfather (I thought him to be in his mid 60s). He walked down Roosevelt Avenue confidently, the cane lending him authority and weight. I can picture him swiftly traversing the streets, stopping at any corner, pointing at something with his cane. And back in the office he would tell everyone how he had explained what the organization was and did—and how people had listened to him. And he had even talked to people who were not on the list. Loud and cheerful, he would describe in mouth-watering detail some coastal Ecuadorian dish he would make for us some day. Affable and loquacious, he moved at ease in the job, even if he got lost with some of the report forms. I imagined he had been in Queens for 30 years, solidly rooted and married, fond of his grandchildren, and keeping himself busy with community work.

But then I was wrong. *I've been talking to Arturo Gómez for a little while, I can read in my notes from those days. He's an interesting case. I would never have expected him to be without immigration status—and he is.* I was surprised. I certainly did not expect Arturo to be undocumented. He looked so settled and comfortable, and there was also his age—it did not make sense. But he was not my only mistake: two other young women on the team did not have papers; perhaps because they spoke perfect English I was convinced they had been born to immigrant parents in the United States (they had been brought as children, overstayed their visas, and never left). And soon there was more. Arturo's walking cane was not one of the perks of his age; he had had an accident on the job. And he was not doing this job for the sake of

distraction; he needed to work. Solidly married he was, but had no grandchildren, and I started suspecting he was younger than I had thought.

As the weeks went by and the end got closer, I began worrying I would lose contact with him. I decided to tell him I was studying Ecuadorian immigration and would like to talk to him at some point. It did not look like he knew what I meant, but still nodded amiably in response. And yet the last day of work he came to me and lowered his voice: “Listen, Nicolás, you want to work?” I raised my eyes in surprise. “I’m about to start at this place, cleaning. They’re looking for people. Give me your phone number.” My blood rushed up to my head. How was it possible? Had I just not told him I was studying? What could I say? How was it possible he had got so confused? Surprised but also flattered, I looked at him and replied “yes, why not,” answering him as I answered myself. As we all ate later that evening someone who knew I studied sociology dropped the name of Talcott Parsons on my plate; she had read it in school and expected me to say something. I blushed and hid my face in the chicken. I had just been admitted to immigrant life; I did not want to leave so soon.

About two weeks passed and I realized it was all false alarms; he was not going to call. I started thinking of other ways to approach him, disappointed, and relieved. And then I found his raspy voice on my voicemail: “Nicolás, it’s Arturo speaking, get in touch with me as soon as you can, it’s about the job.” By this time he is all over my notes: *I called him back and he said there could be a job for me where he works, cleaning a building in Manhattan. It’s four nights a week from 11 pm to 7 am at \$9 an hour. He said that I should be ready for Tuesday. And then he said he was getting in an elevator and his phone signal got lost. He called me back the next day: It’s Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays—sweeping, mopping—the work is light [el trabajo es liviano]. They give you an hour for lunch—you can even sleep if you want. Stop by my house tomorrow to fill out the application. I gulped and said I*

didn't have much experience—and actually didn't have work papers. He was surprised. So you don't have fake papers [papeles chuecos]? I've been meaning to get them, I stuttered, but haven't yet. Silence. I thought you did have fake papers. No. Well why don't you stop by tomorrow so we can talk?

I was living in New Jersey so the ride to Queens was long. I'm leaving for Arturo's soon. I should bring money in case there's a chance to buy the papers. I took the PATH at Journal Square, transferred to the Queens-bound F train at 23rd Street, then changed to the 7 at 74th Street-Jackson Heights. I called him when I got to the corner of Northern Blvd and 84th. He waved his hand from the door. Hey, Nicolás, What's up? How have you been? [¿Qué más ha habido Nicolás? ¿Cómo ha pasado?] I walked up the stairs and met María Delia: his wife. On the table were two empty plates. I was hungry. Before anything happened I had lentil soup in front of me. It was delicious. There was also grated cheese and croutons for the soup. There was Pepsi to drink. When I finished my bowl I was told to have more. I hesitated, the wife said yes, don't be shy. Was I getting in trouble? Who was I trying to fool? As if the hot soup had some sort of narcotic effect, I calmed down and let things happen. The soup being so real, I could believe so was everything else: I was just another immigrant looking for work.

The magic did not last long. No more food in sight, we started talking; no more bonding over hot soup. Nice but more cautious, less open than her husband, María Delia set the tone. So you're from Argentina, she told me. She had been in Buenos Aires because her sister is married to some sort of diplomat and lived there, and where hasn't she lived. From Buenos Aires she remembered Recoleta, Avenida Santa Fe, San Telmo, Puerto Madero, the fanciest areas in town. Also, she is familiar with upstate New York, her brother lives near Syracuse. She even knew la Universidad de Cornell. It seemed as if she were looking for me, and catching up fast. I was tense. She

mentioned her extended family several times; the diplomat, who studied here in the United States, and her upstate brother, who has his own company, and also two or three of their nephews who are pursuing graduate degrees, one of them in Holland. What kind of family was this? Who were they? From the table where we were sitting, between the entrance door and the kitchen, I could not see much of the house. There are two fridges and two or three men walked by—I guess they sublet one or two rooms. It looks very small.

We talked about the job. Arturo showed me his driver's license. It has his picture but someone else's name and Arturo's sister's address. The name is borrowed from a friend of his, Miguel Tronco, someone he knows from Ecuador. This friend's social security number [número de social] is real but he doesn't use it because he works driving a van without reporting income [así nomás]. For him it's good to have someone contributing to social security with his number. The license looked obviously fake. He showed me the application but said it would be better if I talked to Carlos Padilla. He's the person you have to talk to—I'll give him your number. Remember, Nicolás, he looked at me in the eye: don't ever say Arturo Gómez, he knows me by Miguel Tronco. I left around 3 pm. I had stayed for little more than an hour and was surprised and excited—and very tired. I walked back to the train and took the long ride back to New Jersey. It was December 31st.

I. Night Shift Dominoes

Carlos Padilla turned to me and asked me if I knew how to get gum out of the carpet. I hesitated for one moment but said yes. He went on his knees anyway and showed me how to do it with a liquid spray and a scraper. It was my first night at the large department store where Arturo had got me the job. We were in the main lobby and Carlos was the boss. It had not been until that same day that I talked to him on the

phone. *In the beginning he said the job was six days a week and eight hours a day, from 4 am to 12 pm, sweeping and taking out the garbage at two stores. Do you speak English? They can pay you \$9.50 instead of \$9 an hour if you do. The pay is better because the arrival time is so hard, he said. This is the way it is here in this country, and this is not bad—who wouldn't want to work eight hours six days a week. He knew that "Miguel"—Arturo—had told me about the night shift, from 11 pm to 7 am, but that wasn't available now. I told him I had a conflict with another job and would call him back. I decided to say no—waking up at 3 am six times a week was too much. But he said I should work the overnight shift tonight anyway—he couldn't promise me anything, but I would get paid for the day, and then he'd try to get the night position for me.*

The store was near Lincoln Center. *I got there too early. There was a Barnes and Noble on the corner so I decided to wait inside. The contrast was palpable and I felt strange in my outfit—my oldest jeans and sweater and a pair of white sneakers (the security guard at Barnes and Noble kept staring at me). A few minutes after 11 pm Carlos met me in front of the store. We shook hands and walked in through the employee door. He had me check in and introduced me to two other people—Jessica and Junior; then we followed Carlos through the store aisles to a small room almost hidden off the kitchen appliances area. We left our stuff there and got the tools—the dust mops, the cotton mops, and the bucket for the mop; some people got scrapers. We went to the janitors' room that's next to the restrooms and filled up the mop bucket (water and two cups of a red liquid). Arturo was late so it was not until then that I saw him. He wore a white tight T-shirt, no driving cap, and no trace of his cane. He looked 10 years younger. And his attitude was different too: not so friendly, more down to business, more tense.*

And then we started sweeping the floor. Arturo—I was careful to call him “Miguel”—showed me the right moves—otherwise you’ll get too tired, he said. After a while I realized I had no idea where I had swept and where not. Arturo (“Miguel”) and Jessica complained that Junior (who was much younger) was playing the boss and putting pressure on them. Junior ran the floor-washing machine—he had to wait for us to sweep before washing the floors. Arturo and Jessica whispered that he wasn’t waiting, all because he had arranged with Carlos to leave earlier. Junior wore earphones and sang out loud, paying no attention to them. Carlos had to intervene. He looked at me and asked me if I had swept those areas; I got scared and said yes—I did not know if I had. Arturo and Jessica looked at me kind of funny; they expected me to back them up. Carlos said that it was easy to get confused and that was it. After sweeping we had to mop in the wake of the washing machine. The mop was el mopo, one of the “English” words immigrants quickly learn. Jessica asked me if I knew how to do it. I said yes but I didn’t, so she showed me—you have to do it backwards so you mop your own traces away. As I was starting to get into it, the young guy from Colombia to whom I hadn’t been introduced—Steven—came to me and told me, in English, there’s plenty of time, don’t kill yourself.

After struggling with the gum for a while, I sat down and leaned against the wall for a rest. From the other end of the lobby Jessica whispered that there were cameras all over the place. If you’re tired do it slowly, she said, but don’t stop. It was late at night but I could see people outside through the window panes. The spray didn’t work and the carpet was getting messed up. Why did I hesitate when Carlos asked me if I knew how to get gum out of the carpet? What did I think during that moment? I thought that he could not be serious—he could not be asking me to get gum out of the carpet; or I thought that it would look stupid to say I did not know. Was he testing me? I do not think so—it was just part of the job. But it was the last

time he had me do it. *Two hours later Carlos stopped by the lobby and took us to the staff lounge. It was already 4 am—time for the promised lunch break. In the room there were plastic tables and chairs and vending machines. Besides Carlos, Arturo (“Miguel”) and Jessica, there were Junior, Steven, and Daniel, who is the manager (Carlos’s boss). He doesn’t look friendly at all—Carlos told me later to be careful with him. We bought sodas from the machine. I had bought a sandwich outside and shared it with Jessica. We talked until 5. Carlos did most of the talking, but Jessica talked as well. Arturo looked very tired and I think he dozed a bit. I tried to say something every now and then.*

Like Arturo, Carlos is from Guayaquil. He came to the U.S. in 2000 across the border [de mojado]. Before coming he was told that here it was easy to get a job and that he could save about \$10,000 in two years. He thought \$5,000 was enough to start up something in Ecuador, so he would stay only one year. It’s eight years now since I came and I’m still here, he smiled. He was nice to me, mimicking my Argentine accent and asking me several times if I was doing all right. He’s very friendly with Arturo, less so with Jessica. He looks like someone who’s been down on his luck, and he looks tired. He’s chubby—he mentioned that he had eaten at Popeye’s and he bought soda and chips from the vending machines during lunch break. He dresses nicely—a nice hat and dark, urban clothes (even his T-shirt looked good). Jessica is from Perú and I think she’s here on a tourist visa. Back home she worked on the radio and driving a tractor at the Yanacocha mine (she liked the job and the money was good, but the place was too isolated). She traveled quite a bit. I asked her if she had any siblings and she said ten. Are they all in Perú? Yes, she said, I’m the only crazy adventurer.

Carlos told bits of his story in the lounge, perhaps trying to cheer us up, as if being the boss required him to keep the conversation alive. Jessica told me some of her adventures as we took little breaks from sweeping the aisles. I felt I could not ask

many questions. No one asked or expected questions, although they did not seem unhappy to answer if I asked; but I feared they would ask me questions in return. *Work after break was not hard; some more gum removed from the carpet and then easy sweeping along with Jessica. She told me not to grab anything because they check your bag and jacket when you get out. We stopped working around 6:20 am and left the building at 6:50 am. It was good to be back on the street. The four of us took the red line but got separate seats. I got to my train stop at 8 am and bought an apple juice. My throat was sore and my nose dry with dust. I slept until 4 pm.*

The job was always the same—sweeping, machine-washing, mopping, sometimes waxing, and sweeping the floors one more time. We moved up and down the long aisles through the merchandise, sometimes along straight lines, sometimes in circles around shorter shelves. Every night we had to move hundreds of shopping carts so no area was left unclean, and then move them back to where they were. We also cleaned the elevators, the escalators, the lobby where I had removed gum from the carpet my first night, and the staff lounge (a task Carlos always assigned to Jessica, the only woman on the team). Before starting we had to change the dust mop heads, full of dust from the previous night; then we filled the mop bucket and cleaned the cotton mops. We also used dust pans to unload the dust from the mop heads, and there was a specific way of shaking the mop that I learned my first night. The only task involving technical skill was driving the floor-washing machine. It was not simple: the machine could easily get out of control and run into shelves filled with expensive merchandise; and it was crucial to regulate the amount of water the machine left behind—too much or too little water made mopping difficult, and everyone would complain. *As we started working Carlos said something about teaching me to use the machine. I guess he wants to motivate me. Jessica was there and he said nothing to her. She complained later that they were machistas. I told her that it was funny that someone*

who had operated a tractor at a mine in Perú could not operate a floor-washing machine. I don't know if she liked that.

In general there was not much pressure on us. The work was light; Arturo had not lied. Daniel was the manager—American-born Puerto Rican, his Spanish not very good. He was very unfriendly, but did not hurry us. *Jessica complained about Daniel several times. He's rude—doesn't even say hi to us. He thinks he's too good [Como serrano con cargo], she said. He told her to sweep an area that she had already swept; she told him so and he didn't like it, and then complained to Carlos about her talking back to him.* On the other hand, Carlos was easygoing and relaxed. *The turnover in this job is high, he told me, people get tired and quit.* There was too much dead time, partly because there was a sequence to the different tasks, partly because we had to wait for the store stock clerks to clear out the areas we had to clean. *It's hard because the night is long and I don't know where to hide. You have to pretend you're busy all the time. I just stood quietly leaning on my mop when there wasn't anyone around, but Daniel can show up anytime. Otherwise I just went piece of garbage after piece of garbage with the dust pan as slowly as I could, or just wandered aimlessly with my broom, constantly checking the time. It was tempting to jump onto one of the beds they have for sale in the store—but everyone reminded me about the cameras, supposedly all over the place. They also told me not to steal anything because of the cameras—you get bored, however, and stealing is all you start thinking about.*

The lunch break was welcome but bleak; everyone was falling asleep. We all bought junk food from the machines. I wanted the break to come and then I wanted it to be over, too short and too long at the same time. *Over break I was very tired. I didn't feel I could talk to them much. I just sat down and got lost in thought.* Carlos was able to sleep on a plastic chair and sometimes we had to wake him up. *Last night I*

asked Carlos about his schedule. He works for two companies: the evening shift with us and then two shifts for another company—from 8 am to 12 pm and from 5 pm to 10 pm. He sleeps between 1 pm and 4 pm on weekdays, and all weekend long—I need to recover, he said. He works about 72 hours a week. He told me his nickname should be “wity”—a mineral water in Ecuador advertised as “nature’s miracle [un milagro de la naturaleza].” On weekends he only gets up to eat and use the bathroom.

The youngest on the team seemed less tired and sometimes I talked to them. Steven is from Medellín, Colombia. He talks in the Paisa street-smart way, saying “parce” and “parcerito” all the time. He listens to music on an iPod and has a huge feather tattooed on his back. He’s been in the U.S. for 6 years and has a 2 year-old daughter in North Carolina. And then there was Gianni, another Ecuadorian who started three days after I did. Gianni is 21 and also from Guayaquil. He used to date Carlos’s daughter in Ecuador (Carlos was already in the U.S. so they didn’t meet until Gianni made it here). Over break he called her in “Ecua” from the payphone in the staff lounge. He said you can talk one minute for 25 cents. He had worked another cleaning job all day and was working all day today. He’s working about 36 hours in a row—no sleep at all. He’s been in the U.S. for about a year and plans to stay for three more. He said the relationship with Carlos’s daughter was over, and complained about women. He cares a lot about his looks—he dresses differently from Steven, who wears baggy sweaters and pants. Gianni dresses more preppy, polo shirts and classic jeans; it shows he’s not been here that long.

I spent time working with Jessica. She made me feel safe; she was tough and not very friendly, but always knew what to do. Her repertoire of adventures knew no end: car accidents, street fights, drinking stories, and all sorts of jobs. One night she was telling me about her cousin, who was an engineer in Perú and now works in the kitchen at some hotel in Manhattan. I asked her why he had left Perú and she said

something about Sendero Luminoso; I asked her whether she remembered that. Oh yes, she said, I studied at San Marcos for 4 years and Sendero was all over the place. Is it? And what did you study, I asked, my heart beating fast. I studied sociology, she said. Sociology she had said. I looked for the words to tell her I had studied sociology too; it made no impression on her.

I did not talk to Arturo that much. One time I offered him a candy in the staff lounge and accidentally called him “Arturo.” *I corrected myself immediately and said “Miguel” as loudly as I could. His face slightly tensed up but that was it, otherwise keeping every muscle in place. Carlos was not there and I think nobody heard.* Later that night, he met me at one of my mopping stops and asked me what I thought of the job. *He said that it wasn’t bad, not too much pressure. The schedule is kind of hard, I said. Because you’re not used to it, he shot back, and said that my eyes looked small and red. When I was working at the airport we would work from 6 am to 1 am and sometimes stay overnight. I would get paid overtime for every extra hour, making \$500 or \$600 a week.* Working hard and getting paid well—Arturo’s job at the airport stood for better times.

And then there was one lunch break that stood out. I think it was my third or fourth night at the job. *The manager (Daniel) joined us at lunch break. He grabbed a box of dominoes from one of the closets over the sink and invited Carlos to play. It was Carlos, Arturo (“Miguel”), Daniel, and since they needed someone else, they asked me to join them. I barely know how to play dominoes. I was surprised that we would play in pairs—the manager and me versus Carlos and “Miguel.” It was too late to back out. I did my best but had no clue. The two men from Guayaquil played beautifully and crushed us easily. Moreover, they kept driving Daniel crazy, making fun of him in full-blown Guayaquil slang as the score gap increased. He was becoming more and more upset and blamed it on me, asking me what was I doing, and*

forcing me to confess that I didn't know how to play. I quit and Steven came in. They kept losing badly, though, the guys from Guayaquil getting more arrogant, Daniel getting more upset.

Already sitting in the back I watched the scene from the outside and started to enjoy it. *It looked like such a power reversal, the boss humiliated by his employees, and they would pester him for several nights.* Overly excited, I could not help thinking about my role. I had been embarrassed when I realized I would be playing with the manager, my domino skills at the lowest possible level (I had no idea about counting the tiles as they are played, the key to the game). But it worked out strangely—my ineptitude involuntarily contributing to this sort of social revenge. In this dingy room hidden somewhere behind the store, under yellowish fluorescent lights, at some hour lost nowhere in the night, my dominoes clumsiness had opened the way for this little justice. Growing old and exhausted, the two men from Guayaquil had displayed their old power, words and gestures flowing back from the good times and still able to bite. The break was over soon. A grumpy Daniel muttered that it was already 5 am. As I swept along the aisles, I thought someone had to be there to see it—and I had.

One week after the game, luck turned around. As if the small moment of triumph had to be quickly wiped away, Arturo headed too confidently for the escalators. He had suffered work accidents in the past. That is why when I first met him he walked with a cane, and later on I would learn he had a case at the Workers' Compensation Board. This is one of the reasons why he worked under someone else's name: according to his file at the Board he was disabled—"Arturo Gómez" was not allowed to work.

It was finally 4 am and I headed for lunch. As I entered the employee restricted area on my way to the staff lounge, I saw Arturo ("Miguel") sitting on a box and bleeding from his knee. Carlos and Daniel were there, along with the store manager.

He had fallen on his knee as he climbed up an escalator. The escalator was going down, he tried to climb it in the opposite direction, and fell on his knee when he was close to the top. Carlos was lamenting the situation and suggesting that it had been Arturo's fault. It looks like Steven had just done the same and Arturo tried to copy him. But he's not so young, Carlos repeated, and now look what happened. Someone said that it was because they wanted to get to the lounge without stepping on the just-waxed floor. Jessica quickly suggested that the smell from the wax might have made him dizzy. Carlos and Daniel insisted that it had been Arturo's fault—an old guy doing silly things. I think neither Carlos nor Daniel wanted the ambulance, but the store manager called 911. I asked him if he wanted water and he said yes; he drank a lot of water. They arrived shortly and an EMT took care of him. She spoke Spanish and seemed professional, but not too nice. The wound looked deep. She asked him for an ID and he produced the fake one he has ("Miguel Tronco"). They asked him how old he was and he had to stop and think. He said "it is 1957, so it's 50." People laughed. The date of birth on the ID was not his. They asked him if he could walk and he tried but couldn't, so they sat him on a small wheelchair they had with them. I thought someone was going to go with him but no one did. I brought his stuff from the closet and he asked me to take care of his umbrella. He left on the chair with the EMT and the driver, alone to some hospital. We went to lunch and both Carlos and Daniel suggested that it was going to be difficult for Arturo to keep his job—climbing the escalator in the opposite direction was not allowed, and there was a camera right in front of the escalator; and he was going to miss quite a few days anyway. It sounded cruel the way they talked about it and then it wasn't nice that they started laughing about something else. I ate Arturo's food—a Maruchan instant soup.

Although I did not know it yet, it was the last time I saw Arturo at work. The next day I heard he had got fourteen stitches and stayed in the hospital until 2 pm. I

could see him sitting on a box, producing his fake ID and not remembering “his” age, leaving the store in a wheelchair. The accident had been silly but meaningful: it happened because he pretended to be younger than he was, or because he did not want to step over the areas just waxed—displaying his usual zeal at work; or perhaps because it was 4 am and he was badly sleep-deprived. Carlos and Daniel talked about the rules he had violated and how it was his fault; the possibility that he might sue the company in the air. Again, I could not help thinking about my role. As his self-appointed assistant, I gave him several glasses of water, took his umbrella home, and even ate his food—it felt better than throwing it away. I also thought about going with him in the ambulance, but then I realized it would have looked too strange.

Soon I was not the new one anymore. I started listening to music as I worked and my perception of everything changed. My appearance also changed. My outfit started to feel better. As I listened to music I started walking differently, too. At some point I discovered I could make coffee in the staff lounge, and cough drops helped with the dust in my throat. By now I could cruise the aisles at full speed as I followed the music, casually handling the broom with the palm of one hand. But I was exhausted and unable to do anything other than sleep when I was not at work. Time to recover was never enough—when we left every morning we did not say see you tomorrow, but see you tonight. I had worked for little more than two weeks. I called Carlos and told him I was quitting the job.

II. Yo tenía mi empresa allá en el Ecuador

[I had my own company there in Ecuador]

A few days after the fall on the escalator I stopped by Arturo’s house to see him and return his umbrella. My notes record the visit under January 20th, two days before I left the cleaning job. *He was using a crutch and had a big bandage all over his knee.*

It took him a while to climb up the stairs. He had talked to the cleaning company's owner, a Colombian guy, and told him that he wanted to get back to work (implying he wasn't thinking of filing a claim). The guy promised he would take care of the medical bills. Arturo said he had been to the hospital for a second MRI and everything looked fine. He said he'll be back to work in a week—even before he has the stitches taken out. I wanted to take advantage of Arturo's time off. Once again I said I studied sociology and was writing about immigrants—and would be interested in doing interviews with him. This time I mentioned my school provided me with \$20 an hour to compensate interviewees for their time. He said no problem and we planned to start in three days.

The transition felt surprisingly smooth. Was it possible? One night we are cleaning together, three days later I am doing an interview with him. Over time I realized that the change stunned Arturo much less than I thought. I had seen him change too. One day he was the loquacious grandfather walking the neighborhood, next time he was the tough cleaning worker mopping the floors. My switching between floors and interviews was not so different from his. Back in the beginning, when he had first offered to get me the cleaning job, I had been taken aback. Had I not said I was studying? I wondered how he could be so confused. Later on I understood the “confusion” stemmed from his experience. First, I realized “student” meant nothing to him. I was a “student” like he was something else; here in New York City the two of us needed work. Second, work meant work: the type of job did not matter at all. Like everyone he knew, Arturo saw jobs and people as easily interchangeable; your job had nothing to do with who you were.

Offering money may have made the transition easier, too. It reinforced his understanding of the interviews as work—and he was entirely flexible regarding work. Although I feared that paying him for the interviews would put too much distance

between us, I expected it would help make our meetings more formal, creating time slots with the conversation focusing on my questions. It did not happen this way. Money went unnoticed or rather reinforced the type of relationship we had before. We had met working together, he had taken me to work with him, and now it was I who was offering him work. We were working partners, taking turns to help each other out. This type of reciprocity framed all the interviews we did. While it made our relationship warmer, it limited the questions I could ask (our “partnership” implied much taken-for-granted ground). Likewise, because of the way it had started, our type of connection encouraged Arturo to answer my questions more practically than personally—the interviews resembled any other job.

At first money made me uncomfortable, but soon started feeling “normal.” By paying him for his time I was making the otherwise suspicious interviews intelligible to the immigrant context. Money legitimized our interaction, and that was no surprise. What was different is that it did not seem to create distance; it did not make my relationship with Arturo more formal or colder. It was not the first time I noticed something strange about immigrant money, and it would not be the last. In non-immigrant spaces there tends to be a distinction between market and other ties (such as family and friendship); money flows at ease in the market, but not in personal relationships. Among immigrants the distinction is much blurrier. The orientation to work being so dominant, money runs through all kinds of relationships. Money is the language of immigrant life. Money is personal; it is even warm.¹⁰⁷ In addition to legitimizing the interviews, money connected Arturo and myself more deeply—it helped make us “imaginary partners.”

¹⁰⁷ Sociology has long associated money with coldness, impersonality, and distance. Without entirely challenging this approach, Viviana Zelizer (1989) called attention to several sub-varieties of money. Immigrant money—or money as is perceived by immigrants—can be seen as one of such “special moneys.” One of its defining characteristics stems from its dominant place in immigrant imagination. Being so emotionally loaded, money exchanged among immigrants may work as gifts do in reciprocity systems: it creates social bonds.

Arturo would keep offering me cleaning work. “So how’re you doing,” he would ask, and I knew the question was about work. I would try to mutter something about my own work; he would look at me strangely and tell me about some opportunity. “At this place where I work on Sundays they often need people. There’s no one around, you work by yourself. It’s only sweeping, vacuuming, and taking out the garbage—and the garbage cans are really small; it’s \$9 or \$10 an hour for three hours, and if you finish in two you can go home. And you know, Nicolás, this way people get to know you, and then they can recommend you when someone goes on vacation or gets sick. And there’s no problem with papers or anything.” The tape recorder is right there as he speaks—it makes no difference: my research project is hidden in plain sight. And he would often ask me to let him know if I knew of any other jobs. “Even for a few hours,” he would say, “I’m always ready to work.”

Money did not keep our interaction from going beyond the interviews (we never used the word interviews). Before turning the recorder on and formally starting, we talked at length about something else, mostly the community organization where the two of us had worked and met. Likewise, Arturo commonly fixed me lunch or had me try something he or his wife had cooked. I have mentioned the lentil soup they had me eat when I came over for the first time. I was hungry and ate enthusiastically, and the soup and other meals helped bridge the differences between us. I happily praised the food and never said no. Someone this hungry, I figured, would be easier to trust. And it was not difficult: food at Arturo’s was always mouth-watering and never enough.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ “Of all the things people have in common,” Simmel (1997 [1910]: 130-5) writes, “the most common is that they must eat and drink.” When deciding whether helping myself to more food at Arturo’s, I feared both abusing and rejecting his hospitality; it was difficult to decide when to stop. Eating is “the most egotistical thing, indeed the one most absolutely and immediately confined to the individual,” Simmel goes on, and yet “Communal eating and drinking . . . unleashes an immense socializing power.” The few times I said no to his food because I had already eaten were strange; it seemed as if I were taking something important away from our interaction; as if by having chosen to eat on my own I had excluded him from my most human side. At someone else’s house I once had to reject lunch because I

When I went to his house for our first interview, he was already walking well, again using the cane. *We had chicken and vegetable soup and talked about work*, I can read in my notes. It was difficult to jump into the actual interview; it was easier to pretend we were partners, chatting and eating together. I finally pulled out my tape recorder; it was almost painful. And yet there was not much to worry about: the recorder triggered still another piece of casual conversation. *How much it was, he asked me, examining the little machine. My friend has one too and he recorded this time his boss told him to go to hell.* Like money, the recorder could turn from an object dividing us into an object uniting us. A short silence paved the way to the interview. He said “Well” and waited for me to say something. Another pause—I can hear it—and the interview finally started.

This time I got here in 2001, April 16th, 2001. I came because of what happened in my country. I had an import and export company. I think I showed you my importer and exporter ID. I had my own company there in Ecuador [Yo tenía mi empresa allá en el Ecuador]. I have no reason to lie. I handled many import and export deals; by air and by sea. I had my office, I had my employees. I had many clients. The thing is that years ago there was this so-called bank holiday in my country. On that bank holiday, supposedly, banks closed in Ecuador. It was like a recession, but banks closed. The bank accounts were frozen—I had my own money and money from the companies I was working for . . .

Not long ago Arturo Gómez had his own import and export company, including clients, office, and employees. Then he lost everything and migrated to the

did not feel well—my host was visibly disturbed and kept insisting that I should eat; only when I explained that I was hang over did he smile and relax—I was letting him see my human “weakness.” The importance of communal eating, of course, is not exclusive to immigrant life; but in the immigrant context appears as one of the few possibilities to connect.

United States to work cleaning jobs. His problems began with a bank holiday. The money in his accounts was frozen and turned into certificates of uncertain worth; and it was not only his money, but money from his clients as well. He had to cash the certificates on the black market, losing much of what he had. And this happened twice. The first time he recovered, the second time he did not. In addition he lost money from the safe deposit box he had in the bank; when the bank reopened money was missing, and so was his wife's jewelry, or part of it. He could not take it anymore. Soon he left for the United States. He was 47 years old.

So these are things that are hard for me to remember because of all the effort, all my work. I was preparing my son to take over the business. My father—he is still alive—is the one who taught me. I studied in the Customs School, then took classes at the university to get my licence. I still have my Customs licence—whenever you want I can show it to you. I did all that. And my daughter did it too . . . I came here because I said this can't go on. I left everything there but my wife stayed. I came to stay here and get my family back on track [sacar mi familia adelante] and in a short time—or the time I was going to be here—work for some time [trabajar una buena temporada] and then go back to my country. I made the decision overnight.

III. Vivir en la Oscuridad [Living in the Shadows]

We had talked for about an hour when the telephone rang. It was his wife's niece calling from Ecuador to congratulate her for her birthday. Arturo told her to call her at work—she babysits two girls. They talked about the floods in Ecuador; he had been watching everything on Guayaquil's Canal Uno. As they talked I looked around the place. *It's the second floor; there's a small dining area between the entrance and the kitchen, one bathroom, and five bedrooms.* Arturo shares one of the bedrooms with his wife and his daughter, who is 25. The landlord is Dominican and lives downstairs;

they pay \$650 per month. The other roommates pay less because it is only one person per room; they are male and change often—I saw several of them moving around the apartment. There are at least two other Ecuadorians in the house (one from Guayaquil). The block is residential and tree-shaded, though the trees are short. It is between Jackson Heights and East Elmhurst, half a block from Northern Boulevard, five blocks from Roosevelt Avenue, two miles from La Guardia Airport. After hanging up the phone Arturo summed up the conversation for me: “It was my wife’s niece; they have money.”

And here when I got to New York City it was looking for work and looking for work. My sister was supposed to help me, she was going to have a job for me. But the person with the job never showed up. So I looked for a job myself at a supermarket on 37th Ave and 73rd Street here in Queens. The manager was Colombian. I started working there and then kept looking for another job, so I wouldn’t have only one job. I started working in cleaning from 5 am to 10 am. And at the supermarket I worked from 4 pm until 10 or 11 at night. So it was two part-times. When I came home in the morning I rested, got up at 2:30 pm, took a shower and left for work. I brought my own lunch.

After working the supermarket and cleaning jobs for a while he got in touch with a cousin of his working for an air freight company’s subcontractor at JFK airport, delivering packages in downtown Manhattan. The job was not bad and it had some connection to what Arturo did in Ecuador—at least there was merchandise moving around. It was from 6 am to 2 pm, so he left the supermarket job (but kept the cleaning one). On September 11th—it was still 2001—Arturo and his cousin were driving the company’s van from JFK to the WTC buildings where they often had to drop packages. As they drove over the Brooklyn Bridge, they saw the explosion in the first

tower, and then the plane crashing into the second one. Most of their work was in the downtown area. Two weeks later Arturo was out of work.

In October there was a job fair at Penn Station and he decided to try his luck. The *New York Times* reported the event: “By the time the doors opened yesterday morning at the Twin Towers Job Expo, a city-sponsored effort to assist New Yorkers who lost their jobs in the wake of the World Trade Center disaster, the line wound three times around the two square blocks at Madison Square Garden and Pennsylvania Station.”¹⁰⁹ Arturo remembers well:

So I woke up early, left the house at 5 in the morning. I have no documents but I took the risk. The police were there, and the line to get in was three or four blocks long. And I saw people who were well dressed [bien puesta]; you could tell they were office workers. People from the WTC area, imagine suddenly losing your job. I saw myself in that image, those people. They were Americans—people who have documents, maybe residents or already citizens—and suddenly losing their jobs. It was painful, but I never gave up. If you want to get something, you have to look always forward, never back. I said to myself: all or nothing [tripa o suerte]. Either I get something or I lose everything. I was waiting in line, it was so cold, I was all wrapped up in my winter clothes [Yo en la fila, un frío, arropado todo, enguantado]. I didn't get in until around 10. The companies were all along the halls with their tables, offering job opportunities. But I don't speak much English, I understand some. I applied at Strawberry, a cleaning company, Gap, Banana Republic. Out of four or five applications three companies called me.

Seven years later, his memories of the Penn Station job fair still vibrate with confidence. Of course he was scared—he had no documents and police were all over

¹⁰⁹ The *New York Times* article is Wyatt 2001: “Thousands of Out-of-Work People Attend Job Fair.”

the place. But he had to take risks. He compared himself with the people in suits who had suddenly lost their corporate jobs in the WTC area—people who did have documents. While he empathized and felt sorry for them, he noted their relative advantage—documents—to stress his own drive: “I never gave up.” In this highly patriotic fair aimed at helping the 9/11 survivors, Arturo Gómez—foreigner and undocumented—was rather out of place. As he has told me, however, “if you’ve come to this country it’s for something [el que ha venido aquí es por algo],” and he was not going to miss the chance. Oozing self-assurance, he recalls the journey almost epically. He overcame his fear of the police, got there early (according to the *New York Times*, “job offers did result for some of those with enough foresight to be among the first in line for the fair”), waited for hours in the cold, and prevailed over the language barrier to file several applications.

The first one to call me was a plating company over in the Bronx. I didn’t have papers but took the risk. I gave them my information and they took me. They plate metals in copper, gold, or silver; or they make it look old. Then they sell it like antiques, but it’s a lie. I worked with two men from Puerto Rico [dos señores boricuas]. We nickel-plated car plates, chrome plates, things like that.

It was all day standing up. Eight hours, from 7 am to 3 pm. You had your hour for lunch [tu hora de lonch] and that was it, or you could use the bathroom—but you couldn’t move or slow down, because the owner’s son in law was around, and he’d pick on a worker and fire him right away. The owner was different, an older man. I saw that near my work spot there were shelves, tools, a work area. So I asked and was told that it was the owner’s. He wasn’t working anymore, but every now and then he came and did his own pieces himself. I met him, by chance, and liked him a lot. You

could tell he was nice. But his son in law was in charge and was a bastard [un desgraciado].

And this company had hired several people who were on parole, people who were in jail. What faces! Not that I want to denigrate anyone . . . but you're always scared something could happen. Thank God nothing happened. One day the police came and arrested two guys who had a device on their leg to tell where they are, and they had gone beyond the limit. And I didn't like that, you know, because of the identification thing and so many things. Sometimes they told me to work on Saturday, and so I did.

And then I don't know what happened. It was pay time, and the employee who was handing out the checks told me: Look, this is your last day. What have I done? Have I done anything wrong? No, it's just that he said that that's it. OK, it's fine, I tell him, no problem. The manager didn't take the blow but would send one of the employees to tell you, the one who handed out the checks and also worked with us. They had said that I was too slow, but that wasn't true. I had been there for almost six months; and you know after your sixth month you become a permanent employee. I was told this guy always did the same to people.

Two lines cut this reconstruction in halves. For one thing, Arturo distinguishes between the company's owner and his son-in-law. The owner is an old patriarch who keeps coming to work even though he is retired; his son-in-law is abusive and despotic and will not get off the workers' back. Of course, Arturo identifies with the polite if distant owner and despises the son-in-law.¹¹⁰ By drawing the distinction between the

¹¹⁰ A few details suffice to google and find the plating company's website: "The Company is an ISO 9001:2000 Certified Organization that boasts over 175 years of professional experience with a management team second to none. Building on the foundation established in 1947 by the Founder and President, the staff offers you all of the assistance that you will need towards the very best in Electro-

two, Arturo complains about his boss without complaining about bosses. The second dividing line goes through his references to the inmates or former inmates working along with him at the company. Two different dangers get mixed up. He clearly expresses his fear of them: “What faces!” But he also says that this presence attracted the police—and this was problematic because of his own lack of documents. He was scared of his coworkers because of their background—and he was scared of them because of his own legal situation.

After getting fired he called one of the cleaning companies where he had already worked and went back to that job. He had just started when he was called by Strawberry—the clothing and accessories retailer—in response to another one of the applications he had done at the post-9/11 job fair several months earlier. He went there for an interview with the people in charge of recruiting—and he described it for me:

I went to the Strawberry office the day I had my appointment. I spoke with a young woman, Hispanic. I was asked all the questions, they had me fill out the form, and then she entered the questions in the computer and gave me my score: 93 points out of 100. When she read that score she tells me: Welcome to working with us. The young lady was very nice. I tell you honestly I was flabbergasted [me quedé con la boca abierta]:

-You qualify for these positions. In which one would you like to work?

-Well . . . Any position you need me for. I'd like it to be in a merchandise warehouse, receiving and dispatching merchandise, classifying merchandise. Or if you want me to do maintenance, or cleaning, any of these things I can do. I can't choose my own

Plating and Metal Finishing. From your first contact with us, through the quoting process and ultimately the delivery of your finished parts, you can look forward to being treated courteously and professionally.”

work, you have to tell me. If you see I'm doing fine, OK, if not you can change me to something else, I know I can do it.

So the young lady saw how I spoke to her and she liked it. You know that by talking and communicating with people you can help yourself. You help yourself and at the same time you help the other person. Oh, she tells me, you're the one I was looking for. That's what people say when they're sincere: you're the one I needed. And then she tells me, OK, sign here, and when she asks me for my social security number—then I told her: Look, to be honest, I work with my ITIN, the number I got from the IRS. I don't really have . . . She was taken aback [Ella se quedó] . . . No, she tells me, the company here cannot . . .

I did it this way because I wanted to be sure. I felt confident. So I said, well, I'm going to stop living in the shadows [vivir en la oscuridad]. I want to get back on my feet by myself [Quiero yo mismo salir a flote por mi persona]. Believe me I didn't do it so they wouldn't give me the job. I did it so they saw who I am and how I want to do my things. But then I realized—one more time in my life—that being honest is more damaging than being a liar, a villain, the people who go around lying. It's like that guy who became a policeman by stealing his dead cousin's identity . . . and because of one of his coworkers' meanness . . .¹¹¹ I've already learnt that here in this country you

¹¹¹ Arturo refers to Oscar Ayala-Cornejo—the Mexican-born Milwaukee policeman who worked under his American-born and dead cousin José Morales. “The life that Mr. Ayala-Cornejo carefully built here,” the *New York Times* reported in December 2007, “including more than five years with the police force, is to end at noon on Saturday, when, heeding a deportation order, he will board a plane bound for the country he left as a child.” Ayala-Cornejo’s story was widely covered by the media. It combines the drama of undocumented children (Ayala-Cornejo came to the United States when he was 9 and did not know he was undocumented until he told his father he wanted to enroll in a police apprenticeship program) and a type of identity fraud that has an element of “anthropophagy” to it: “A cousin in Illinois had a son, José A. Morales, a United States citizen who had died of leukemia in Mexico. He and Mr. Ayala-Cornejo would have been about the same age, and the family offered to turn over José’s birth certificate and Social Security number so Mr. Ayala-Cornejo could realize his dream.” The quotes are from the *New York Times*: Einhorn (2007).

have to lie to get your things and goals. And I don't mean bad goals, no. Good goals. You need to work. And if you've come to this country it's for something . . .

Hiking intrepidly across the city and doing whatever had to be done, Arturo seemed to move fluently in the world of immigrant work. And yet this job interview at Strawberry shows him candidly ignoring rule number one. It is perhaps because of excessive fluency that he fell into the trap. Intoxicated by his performance on the test and his rapport with the interviewer, Arturo thought he could do it. As he puts it, “I felt confident.” Even if he had already lost two jobs, things were going fine. The interview was coming along smoothly. The interviewer seemed to be impressed. It was possible to move one step further—to finally say it, to “get out of the shadows,” to not have to worry anymore, to be himself: “I wanted to be myself—my own person. I had this social security number—who knows whose number that was. And I had my ITIN—I was doing my income taxes every year, that was OK.”¹¹² It may have been his first big disappointment. The good rapport with the interviewer meant nothing: here the rules were the rules. “I learned once again that honesty is not the way. If you want to get ahead in this country,” bitterness inflecting his raspy voice, “you have to lie.”

After working for about two months at an Astoria supermarket, Arturo had not gotten paid. “Why haven’t I got my check?” he asked his supervisor, and was told that

¹¹² The IRS website explains: “An Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) is a tax processing number issued by the Internal Revenue Service . . . IRS issues ITINs to individuals who are required to have a U.S. taxpayer identification number but who do not have, and are not eligible to obtain a Social Security Number (SSN) from the Social Security Administration (SSA).” What is an ITIN used for? “ITINs are for federal tax reporting only, and are not intended to serve any other purpose. An ITIN does not authorize work in the U.S. or provide eligibility for Social Security benefits or the Earned Income Tax Credit. ITINs are not valid identification outside the tax system.” Are ITINs valid for work purposes? “No. ITINs are for federal income tax purposes only. Getting an ITIN does not change your immigration status or your right to work in the United States.” Undocumented immigrants are not authorized to work in the United States—but they are welcome to pay taxes anyway. The quotes are from the IRS website: <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=222209,00.html> [retrived 09/09/10]

“the company isn’t going to pay you because you’re working with fake papers, this social security number [número de social] is not yours.” Around that time he saw fliers for the community organization where I eventually met him for the first time. He went to the office and talked to one of the organizers; she called the supermarket and was told that they did not know any Arturo Gómez. But Arturo had taken pictures and was upset. At the organizations he had seen signs for the Department of Labor.

My sister is all scared and tells me, no, what are you going to do that for, you have no papers, you’ll get in trouble . . . I tell her, look, sister: I have committed no crime, haven’t killed anyone, haven’t run anyone over, haven’t stolen. If Immigration catches me it’s OK. Sir: Back to your country. If they say something I can talk to a lawyer because that’s my right. Anybody here in the U.S. has the right to talk to a lawyer. He who owes nothing fears nothing. My only crime is overstaying my time here in this country. And so I went to the Department of Labor and brought all I had. I’m the kind of person who likes saving every paper, not throwing anything away. I had the pin they gave me with my name showing that I had been working at the supermarket. I was helped by this Puerto Rican or Dominican girl. I told them look, here are the pictures. I left them the pictures—I had made three copies. They always take all the information, the company, everything. And that’s what I did and I won it—the company paid me back.

By now Arturo had learned; he had come to terms with not having legal status. In the worst case scenario, he thought, an immigration officer would tell him, gentlemanly, “Sir: Back to your country.” There was nothing to fear. His dignity was not at risk. “All or nothing,” he has told himself before making difficult moves, more than once. His sister had lived in New York City for almost four decades and she was scared. Why would he get in trouble? What was the point? Arturo headed for the

Department of Labor's Manhattan office on Vatic Street with all the evidence he had. No one asked him about his immigration status, and the claim worked out fine. At the Strawberry interview he had wanted to tell the truth and "get out of the shadows"—it was not possible. Now he could see that the shadows were not really the shadows—once inside the country, the borders between the legal and the illegal were blurry. If you were fine with it, the system was willing to go along. Honesty was not an option. So what?

IV. Boundaries Redrawn

Defeating the supermarket led Arturo to get more involved with the community organization, particularly the emerging Workers' Committee [Comate de Trabajadores]. Based on his own experience, he helped educate other immigrants about their rights in this country. Talkative and fatherly, he would tell everyone about keeping records and building evidence, generously dispensing advice. And yet sooner than later he started to feel uncomfortable. His time at the organization would gradually get worse, and at some point he stopped attending the meetings altogether. Somehow suggesting that his place had not been properly acknowledged, Arturo complained about both the organizers and other members. My notes record an incident he mentioned before one of our interviews:

One time the workers' committee organizer sent him to a training on health and safety at the work place; it was good because you were paid \$500 to take the class (you were then expected yourself to give the same training to other workers). The organizer chose who could go; in addition to Arturo and his daughter, who was there as well, she chose two other people from the committee and someone Arturo refers to as the "Mexican guy"—he had been to a couple of meetings but wasn't very active. According to Arturo the organizer chose this "Mexican guy" because he was out of

work at the time. The problem was that this guy spoke no English, and the training was in English. Arturo often says that he speaks very little English, but he can understand some. But English wasn't the only problem: there was something about this guy's looks or attitude that Arturo didn't like; he wore some kind of hair-band, and he always sat at the back, watching, and never having anything to say. Arturo said that the guy had no education whatsoever, and he made some reference to this guy being from the countryside (he also said something about so many people here in the U.S. with little or no education). The thing is that the last day of the training, the instructor asked everyone if there was something they hadn't understood. The Mexican guy stood up from his place in the back and said that he hadn't understood anything at all from the very beginning. Arturo was extremely upset. He stood up and told him that if that was the case he should have spoken up a long time ago—and this is something that makes him really mad to this day.

Why was he so upset? Because this “Mexican guy” was somehow speaking for all of them; and Arturo was trying hard to fit in, making an effort to overcome—or hide—his own language problems. The sudden revelation threatened his attempt at adjusting and brought to light his difficulties. It also did not help that he was getting along very well with the instructor (an American woman married to an Ecuadorian); and his daughter was there, too, making him even more sensitive. No one, most likely, had understood anything, but that was not the point; the point was that this was a rare opportunity to make money in a very different way. Everyone—surely including the instructor—was happy to pretend. This annoying “Mexican guy”—uneducated and rude—stood up from his shady place in the back and put them all on the spot. The scene was ruined. What was he doing at the training? Arturo could not forgive it.

The story sums up Arturo's difficulties interacting with other immigrants. Implicit in his anger is his astonishment at the organizer's blindness. How is it

possible they do not notice that not everyone is the same? By sending the “Mexican guy” to the training, the organizer overlooked the differences and mixed everyone together. Of Dominican descent but born in New York City, the organizer could not care less about these “differences” (her job was actually to ignore them so different people could work together). But Arturo’s anger shows that he was not giving up on drawing some boundaries—or preventing them from disappearing altogether. In the organization—more generally, outside work—Arturo wants to be seen as himself. And being himself in that context was much about not being seen as the “Mexican.” It is not the same education, attitude, looks—it is very different and the organizer had missed it. By suggesting that no one had understood anything, the “Mexican” guy highlighted one of their similarities (neither of them could speak English) and suddenly erased all boundaries.

At work Arturo’s attitude is different. He would tell me, for instance, about two young Guayaquileans who started working with him at the cleaning job after I quit. “One of them told me about another job opportunity, and if he gets it he’ll see to take me with him. Because I help them too: when I’ve brought food and they haven’t, I share with them.” This is not about these coworkers being from Guayaquil. “It’s just the way I am [mi manera de ser]. My wife always tells me that I have friends everywhere. I know how to win people over. And it’s not that I have this or that or that I have millions in my country—what would I be doing here then? What are you doing here if you have so much in your country?” Arturo makes his point clear. He is not different from them. “I was at the top and fell down [Yo estaba arriba y me vine para abajo],” he admits. At work Arturo abandons his airs—he is among equals. These guys help him and he helps them. Solidarity is based on some sense of equality. Outside work and back in Queens, however, where everyone is an immigrant, the need for distinction creeps back in.

Drawing boundaries is particularly imperative where people are closer: the house. With so many housemates around there have to be problems. Not long ago there was a Mexican-Colombian couple who were really bad: they had tattoos, stole Arturo's wife's wedding ring from the kitchen, and the Colombian woman hit Arturo once. More pressing, however, is Arturo's simmering feud with housemate and fellow Guayaquilean Tulio Hank. When Tulio was around cooking or doing the dishes, Arturo would fall silent or lower his voice. *During our interview today Tulio came to the dining area and asked Arturo about some tax paper that he couldn't find; Arturo tensed up and said that he had given it back to him. Tulio was complaining because he hadn't received the state tax refund that he filed two months ago and joked about this country being underdeveloped. He said that he had made around \$60,000 so his return was big. Arturo rushed to tell me that he used to make that money when he worked at the airport. When Tulio left, Arturo looked pissed off. This one thinks he's still in Ecuador, he grumbled.*

Another time he was telling me about having waxed the floor in the house. "You see how bright it is? I brought wax from the store and waxed it on Sunday." While the Dominican landlord had appreciated the job, Tulio Hank's reaction had been to ask what wax was (Arturo had used the English word when he told him about it).¹¹³ Arturo could not believe it. "How is it possible he doesn't know what wax is?" Then he learned that Tulio had been here only for one year and a half. Arturo could not stand Tulio and could barely conceal it. He perceived him to be arrogant. And this mostly bothered him because Tulio's arrogance was out of place. When complaining about not getting his tax return and not knowing the word wax, Tulio showed lack of

¹¹³ Immigrants use English words for all that is relatively new to them: buildings, taxes, appointments, and many work-related words such as wax, mop or mopo, roof or rufo, scaffolding or escafos, and many more.

adjustment to life in the United States. That is why he can afford to be arrogant and that is what bothers Arturo so much.

Both Arturo and his wife doubted Tulio was the one he pretended to be. This annoying housemate forced them back into the status competition they had left in Guayaquil. Getting back in the game was painful, but inevitable. *After turning the recorder off today there was more about Tulio. María Delia was around: And he says he's an agronomical engineer, she whispered, skeptically. I told them he had said to me that he had a master's in agronomy. They laughed: But the other day we showed him this fruit and he didn't even know what it was—what kind of agronomical engineer is that? They told me that he says that María Delia's brother-in-law was his professor in Ecuador; they don't believe him. So they're thinking of showing him a family picture of the professor and other people to see if he identifies him; they want to prove he's lying.*

Arturo has learned to work like an immigrant—and like an immigrant he has learned to distinguish between work and life. In Guayaquil his job and his personal life were tied together; in New York City work is not connected to who he is. Separating work and life has made it easier for him to adjust to the new work conditions: work is only work. Outside work, on the other hand, he cannot locate himself in the new setting; he is still looking for his social space. The incident with the “Mexican guy” hints at his difficulties interacting with fellow immigrants outside work: his efforts to distance himself from other immigrants proved insufficient; the organizers did not see the differences and lumped everyone together. It has been even more difficult when distances were closer: the daily frictions with his Guayaquilean housemate are about who is who: they are about past and present hierarchies. Outside work there is no order. Arturo struggles to redraw some basic boundaries amid the immigrant mass.

V. Betrayal and Beyond

Mistrust stemming from not knowing who is who runs through Arturo's experience working at the airport. This is the job that he had for the longest time and would always stand for his better days in New York City. After working at the plating company in the Bronx, Arturo was back to one of his cleaning jobs. Then his cousin called him again to work for the delivery subcontractor both had worked for up to the WTC attacks. This time the job was not driving but in the cargo area at JFK Airport. The contractor was an air freight Japanese company.

I started working with my friend's name. You know what had happened at the Strawberry interview, so it was better than using fake papers [con los papeles chuecos que uno dice]. You have a social security number [número de social] that is good, the same person, all the information. I brought everything with me, gave them a copy, and they took me right away. My friend told me himself, Arturo, I give you my number, you work it, it's no problem—through this day. He has a van, works doing deliveries. He's helped me quite a lot, unconditional help. His ex-wife is friends with my wife since high school in Guayaquil. My children have always called him uncle.

Things got this way, that's why I started working with the name of Miguel Tronco. When you want to do things honestly . . . Being honest, Nicolás, sometimes it's not good for you. It hurts [A uno mismo le hacen dañar el corazón]. Because if you try to be honest . . . Ah no—they force you to do things . . . to change everything . . . to work always falsely [trabajar siempre chueco]. That's why I told my wife: in this country—I thank God that I'm working now and at least we have something, we can survive, we're helping our son who couldn't get his visa renewed, yes—but here in this country they force you to do bad things. If you want to work honestly . . . Shoot! So many

obstacles! But you work with fake papers? No one will stop you! [¿Pero trabajas chueco? ¡Corres por todos lados!]

And thus Arturo Gómez became Miguel Tronco. The change was not easy, but he saw no choice. Like in an old liberal argument, Arturo's right to work clashes with restrictions attempting to control the market. Driven by an economic engine, he will overcome the bureaucratic obstacles; he will do anything to work. But danger looms at every corner. The government will not do anything and nor will the company. And yet sooner or later the law will catch him up.

Arturo has good memories of both the manager and company's owner. At some point he talked to the manager and explained the situation: "Look, my real name is Arturo Gómez, and I want to ask you to talk to Glen. I want to do my income taxes, because it's a lot of money . . . So I would need him to make the check to my name." Arturo was still able to get his tax refund, but had to share it with the real Miguel Tronco. Glen, the owner, was one of the kindest persons Arturo has ever met. Next week his envelope still said Miguel Tronco, but the check had been made to Arturo Gómez. He had been working there for almost three years. The hours were long but the money was good.

Sometimes I didn't see my wife for two days. When I left the house she was still in bed, and when I got back she was already sleeping. But Saturdays and Sunday were sacred. On Saturdays after work my friend dropped me off in Manhattan and I told her to meet me there at Manhattan Mall. We didn't get home until 11 at night. Sundays we woke up, went to mass, and then I told her, let's go out, I don't want to know anything about staying inside. From Monday to Friday I don't see you, we don't talk. Let's go eat at some restaurant, let's go out.

“I like helping people and there are many people I’ve helped,” Arturo starts off. “But there are people who will always take advantage of you [cuando tú les das la mano se te quieren trepar a la cabeza].” One Sunday in Queens he ran into one of his closest childhood friends. They had grown up together in the same neighborhood, and the friend was out of work. Arturo took him to work at the airport.

And look what he did to me. I don’t bear a grudge against him [Yo no le guardo rencor]. Only God knows . . . that who does something bad will receive it three or four times over. I would be doing well now. My wife wouldn’t be working. I was making enough money and we lived by ourselves in an apartment with two bedrooms. And then this happened and I had to move to this house. That job was very good . . . It may be that God gave it and took it away from me—I’ve been always told that I should be more careful with the people I bring to work; that you should think of yourself first and only then of other people . . .

The story is not always the same. At first Arturo said that this friend wanted to get his (Arturo’s) position—which was full time. That is why he betrayed him. Eventually more details emerged. The two had lived together. When Arturo’s wife came to New York City, Arturo moved out of the place they shared, and his friend never paid him his part of the security deposit back. Arturo started to get tired. One day at work he came across an envelope with the friend’s payment in cash and decided to collect the debt right away. The friend told everyone that Arturo had stolen money from him—and that his real name was not Miguel Tronco. Both the manager and the owner knew about Arturo’s name, but when news got around the situation became difficult to maintain.

The loss of this job is an open wound. One friend from Guayaquil lent him his name so he could work at this better job (even though it would seem that Arturo had to

share his tax return with him). Another friend from Guayaquil paid him back his getting him work by disclosing his real name. The memory of his friend stabbing him in the back keeps Arturo away from the details. What happened? Did the friend resent that Arturo moved out of their place to live with his wife? How close were they? A money dispute turned sour: the two childhood friends turned into enemies.

Nothing would ever be the same. He paid \$100 at an employment agency on Roosevelt Avenue and they got him a job at a wholesale distributor on the Manhattan Lower East Side. They supplied delis and supermarkets in the area. There were Mexican, Dominican, and Ecuadorian workers, and the owner himself was from Guayaquil. The idea of benefiting from this connection may have crossed Arturo's mind. "I talked to the owner and explained to him that back in Ecuador I had my own company." The owner's reaction is unclear, but Arturo quickly changed the approach: "But that's another story. I know how to work." The owner asked him if he could drive a lift truck and Arturo did not doubt: "Look, I told him: You want to put me to the test? Tell me what you want me to do and you'll see I'll do it." He was in charge of receiving and dispatching the merchandise and drove the lift truck around. But the job's toll on his body would turn out to be unexpectedly high.

One month later I had my accident. Five of us were poisoned with carbon monoxide at work. The lift trucks ran on gas and so did the heating, but the extractor fans were not good. I was carrying a pallet of merchandise on my truck lift, normally. I felt dizzy and my head hurt; I felt sick, like drugged up, and saw that the things in front of me moved back and forth. I got to hit the brakes and turn off the truck, and when trying to get out my foot got tangled and I fell. I don't remember anything. Next thing I know I was in a hospital. When I got back to work, several days later, I learned that five of us had fainted. Then I started getting the bills from the hospital with my name, address, everything; I took them to the company's owner. I gave him the first one, OK; the

second one, OK. When I gave him the third one he tells me: Look, Arturo, I'm very sorry, but I'm not paying this bill, you'll have to pay it yourself. No, I tell him, my accident was here, it's not that it was on the street. And the firefighters were here as well, the paramedics. He said no. OK. I was silent, I didn't say anything. I kept working normally.

In October I had an appointment at the hospital. But, you know, one of those things in life, the appointment got cancelled. I went to work. That day three people didn't show up to work, the people who worked inside the warehouse placing the racks. I'm the one who received and dispatched the trucks; trucks from Coke, Busch, Budweiser, Corona. I was asked if could help the people inside. So I brought the load from the patio, drove into the warehouse, lifted it up, set the ladder, and climbed up to place the stuff on the racks. But such bad luck that the ladder moved to one side and I fell on my back. It was around 1:30 in the afternoon, my lunch time. But I wanted to finish what I was doing. I thank God that my leg got tangled in the merchandise pallet—that's why I didn't fall to the floor but hit my low back, and then was left hanging head down. I was lucky that a Dominican guy—Benjamin, I don't forget his name, he helped me. He lifted me, disentangled my leg, and laid me on the floor. The owner wasn't there but there were other people in charge. I asked for an ambulance, but they never called it. I couldn't breathe. I didn't know I had a broken rib, but I couldn't breathe. One of the employees gave me an ointment—but I couldn't breathe. I had to stop working and lean over one of the boxes, and had to bear it until 5 pm.

When I went home I told my wife what had happened. Can you look at my back, I can't breathe. What is it that you have there, she tells me. My leg hurts, and my foot, and my big toe. My big toe still has a brown line through it—because it's my toe that got

tangled in the pallet and held all my weight. I couldn't stand the pain. My legs and neck also hurt. I took a bath and said it'll get better. No. That same night I went to Elmhurst Hospital. And you know how long they have you wait at Elmhurst before they see you. I got there around 3 in the morning because I couldn't take it anymore. We took a cab and went to the hospital. Right next to my bed in the emergency room there were four beds with four guys handcuffed to their beds, and they screamed and asked for food. Finally it was my turn—not before 8 am, imagine all night long with that pain. They gave me an orthopedic collar so I wouldn't move my neck, and they had me do x-rays. I had a broken rib, the seventh intercostal rib. They didn't give me any medicine; only a bottle-like thing so I blew and put pressure for the rib to go back to its place. And they told me to rest for a week.

I didn't go to work all that week. The accident had been on Monday; on Saturday a friend drove me to the company to see about my pay. You haven't come to work and you still want us to pay you—that's what they said. The owner told me that. So I tell him, Roger, it's not that I didn't want to work, you know well I had an accident. But if it was only a scrape! It was no scrape, here's the hospital report. We're not paying you. You won't pay me? Tell me you're not paying me; I'll leave and that's it; no problem. No—yes—we'll pay you. So then he has me sign a paper saying they had paid me. I'm not signing anything. It was a blank sheet they wanted me to sign at the bottom. His wife got all mad at me—yelling at me.

Arturo did not come back to the warehouse. The final blowup has stuck in his mind. “That guy is the worst [Ese man es cucaracha cucaracha]: There was an Ecuadorian boy that had worked with them for years. He had to do an urgent kidney surgery so we all collected some money for him. The owner didn't even pay him for

one week.” Arturo bonded with his Ecuadorian and non-Ecuadorian coworkers against the boss—teaching two Mexican workers to drive the lift truck (even though the boss did not want them to learn) and celebrating one Dominican who stole \$10,000 from the company, somehow taking revenge for all of them. “They never caught him,” Arturo says.

Soon after Arturo went to see a workers’ compensation lawyer. With their help he filed claims at the Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB) for his two accidents—the carbon monoxide poisoning and the fall from the ladder. At the warehouse he got paid in cash, so proving the employment relationship in court was a challenge. But the company gave its employees the cash in “a white envelope,” and within the envelope there was the calculation handwritten on paper. “Every day I wrote down my arrival and departure time. Monday to Friday from 7 am to 5 or 6 pm, sometimes 7 pm. Saturday at 8 am. I wrote it all down in my notebook. There was a huge clock at the exit.” His evidence was enough in court. Arturo’s medical treatment (mostly physical therapy) got covered by the WCB; and before long the WCB judge granted him weekly payments of \$150.

Physical therapy has not healed the slipped discs in his back; and the long hours of sweeping and mopping most likely do not help. But \$150 per week is too little so he has to work. The case is another reason why he works under someone else’s name—should the insurance company find out he is working, his cash benefits would be stopped. More importantly, the case has become one big if uncertain source of hope for the future. The NY State Workers’ Compensation statute allows for the parties to agree on closing out cases; the insurance company should make him an offer at some point.

VI. Ghosts

Arturo's work history in the United States is full of twists and turns. He has had many jobs, most of them not for long. The story is hard to follow—the dates get all confused in Arturo's memory and he goes back and forth mixing different jobs up. As I listen to the tapes of our interviews, I recoil at my voice interrupting him in search of more precision about some date or place. His own story-telling was not arranged chronologically, and when pushed to do so he kept changing the sequence. Immigrant jobs are not suitable to be narrated. It might be that immigrant work histories are too messy to be meaningful, but the opposite makes more sense: immigrant work histories are messy because they are meaningless. It is hopping from one job to another—there is no direction. Order has no meaning—the story cannot be told.

Chronologies, however, are not the only way to organize stories. Amid the immigrant work routine, there were plenty of events. Bouncing from one job to the other he has learned to move around with no English and no documents. He has learned that trust can be costly: friends are rare in the immigrant underworld. His job interview at Strawberry showed him the limits of not having papers: he learned to work under someone else's name. By gradually forging his undocumented identity, moreover, he learned to play the system to his advantage: he ventured to the Department of Labor and reclaimed his stolen wages, and after his warehouse accidents he successfully filed for NY State Workers' Compensation.

"In this country you have to go around lying," Arturo complains. But it is not so much lying as not telling the truth. His driver's license is fake—but too obviously fake to fool anyone who does not want to be fooled. He has been working under someone else's name—but his bosses knew it full well. More than actually telling lies, the system has forced him to play along. Silence—one type of lying—has been the key

to Arturo's undocumented life.¹¹⁴ And then there is ambiguity—another way of lying without lying he has had to endure. Once the old social boundaries have become invisible, it is difficult to tell who is who. Arturo tried to distinguish himself from the “Mexican guy” at the training, but he could not. He and wife are set to unmask their Guayaquilean housemate, but they cannot. Among immigrants, hierarchies are vague, and Arturo has had to live with that. Immigrants do not lie, but silence and ambiguity is as close as they get to the truth.¹¹⁵

When working the cleaning job with Arturo I was self-conscious, thinking that everyone would notice I did not fit. Then I realized no one fitted, and the boss and other workers at the store simply did not see me or anyone else. I walk by several shelf-stackers as I sweep the floor: I am a ghost. I worked for little more than two weeks. Arturo has been there for a year and a half. His story seems to move in circles, much like sweeping the floor. And then there are sudden breaks. Deep below Manhattan at 4 in the morning, in the staff lounge at the store, two men from Guayaquil play dominoes against their boss, happily crushing him and teasing him no end. Carlos has been working here longer and leads the charge. Arturo shows more restraint, sort of testing the water, but also throws his darts. Their sudden irreverence unsettles the boss, their hidden backgrounds erupting unchecked. Who are the people doing the cleaning?

¹¹⁴ Undocumented immigrants, as historian Mae Ngai put it, are simultaneously “a social reality and a legal impossibility” (2004: 4). No one lies—but everyone pretends. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz writes: “[T]he North American does not tell lies but he substitutes social truth for the real truth” ([1950] 1961: 23).

¹¹⁵ Simmel writes in “The Lie” (1950: 312-3): “Sociological structures differ profoundly according to the measure of lying which operates in them.”

CHAPTER THREE:
VIVIMOS ASI POR MUCHISIMOS AÑOS
[WE LIVED THIS WAY FOR MANY YEARS]

As Arturo submitted his ill-treated body to long hours of work, my questions about his past life sounded badly out of place. His answers, however, flowed more or less easily; by approaching the interviews as he approached other jobs, Arturo detached himself from his stories—memories could be sold. But the contrast between his past and his present was still visible to him. More than once Arturo would add the sentence “I have no reason to lie” when referring to past well-being, as if to buttress his good memories against this very different time. Most commonly we met around 2 pm. He had been up since the previous evening, working the night shift at the store where I had worked with him, and then another cleaning job in the morning; he looked very tired, repeatedly yawning and often getting distracted. Every time I said something about it he would tell me he was fine; “two well-slept hours” was all that he needed. My questions sent this tired man back to Guayaquil—quite another world.

I. The Most Spoiled in the House

One Sunday that Arturo invited me for lunch I met his older sister. She came to New York City three decades before Arturo, and he had complained about her not helping him out when he arrived. Soon she was telling stories from Arturo’s childhood, mostly for me, the only one who had not heard them before. She was good at telling stories; we all laughed. Although the stories were old and had been told many times, she refreshed them with some new details or inflection in her voice. Everyone listened with glee. The stories hinted at their social world back in Guayaquil—I took several mental notes. But it was her warm portrait of young Arturo that impressed me the

most. The picture was flattering—young Arturo was mischievous, restless, almost rebellious; and there were grandparents, aunts, and older sisters who took good care of him. As his sister talked Arturo looked on and enjoyed it. His wife listened as though she had never heard the stories before; even his daughter paid attention. If there was an audience, however, it was me. By telling the stories in front of this new “friend,” Arturo’s sister made her brother an offering of no small worth—only her voice could go back so far away and so far ago to bring this old portrait back to life.

We are four sisters and he’s the only boy—and the youngest one. What a live wire he was [Candela fue]. You know what he did to us? To my aunt—who’s the one who raised us after my mom died—and to my eldest sister? He was a bum [bien vago] and wanted to go out to the corner to play ball. So he caught a mouse—my aunt was terrified of mice. If you don’t let me out I’ll throw it at you. And then he went out and buried the mouse in the garden. Next time you don’t let me out I’ll get the mouse back. This one . . . Let me tell you about him [éste es una historia]. When we went to the beach on vacation—the things he did to the man who delivered the water. There was no drinking water in the house, so it was delivered by donkey. So when the delivery man [burrero] was bringing the water into the house, this pest [zángano] came and stole the donkey. And the poor guy [cholito] was there sitting on the stairs: Excuse me, Madam, but the kid stole my donkey, you’ll have to pay me for the time. He stole it in the morning and wouldn’t come back until 1 or 2 in the afternoon. He would go around on the donkey. Then he would go to the grocery store [kiosko] at the corner and buy on credit [fiaba]. When my dad came back on Saturday, the man from the store would tell him, Mr. Gómez, here’s a bill for you. It was my grandpa that had told the man from the store: Give my grandson anything he wants. So he went there for

sodas and what not with his little friends. It's that my brother [mi ñaño] . . . Such a good one he was [Buena ficha que fue]. He's terrible [horroroso].

I had been asking Arturo about his past life in Ecuador before hearing these stories from his sister's mouth. From early childhood to adult life up to the banking problems that pushed him to migrate, Arturo's stories stood in stark contrast to his present condition. These childhood anecdotes show he was well taken care of by his large tight-knit family, and the family itself seems to have been well known and connected (as suggested by credit at the grocery store, where Arturo had an open tab to treat his little friends on his grandpa's account). Young Arturo, in fact, seems confident to the point of impertinence, and his family does not seem to have disapproved of him. When he "borrowed" the donkey, for instance, no one seemed to care about the donkey's owner, whom Arturo's sister mentions as the poor "cholino" waiting for the child to come back.¹¹⁶ At the beach, where the entire family spent the holidays, the provision of public utilities relied on traditional means: docile donkeys and docile cholos affording little Arturo the sort of fun he would not find in Guayaquil. His small-time thief career would not end with the holidays.

Haven't they told you the story? My cousin had graduated and the whole family was at the graduation party. My dad had just bought a pick-up truck. He didn't want to drive to the party, though, so we took a cab. The party was at its best when someone calls on the phone for my dad. His face was red because he had been drinking, and because he was always red [había sido bien colorado]—and when we look at him he's turned white. He had bought the truck only one month ago. My aunt—the one who lives here—was telling him on the phone that the truck had been stolen. We took a cab to

¹¹⁶ The word "cholo" is used in different ways, but generally refers to people of indigenous background, often from the highlands. Ecuadorian sociologist and former president Osvaldo Hurtado defines "cholo" as a "pejorative term for a mestizo or an acculturated Indian" (2010: 203).

the police station [la comisión de tránsito] to file a report. My dad was friends with the police captain there; we gave him the information [todos los datos] to put an ad in the newspapers, and then we left for the house. Two blocks away from the house I say I must be seeing things [viendo visiones]: the truck is there. I can't believe it, my dad says. My sister was joking? It's not possible. The truck was right there. What had happened? This pest [zángano] had stolen the key. First he had left a decoy in his bed with my dad's pillow under the sheets. Then once he saw that my aunt had gone to bed, he got the key and left, and put the truck in neutral and pushed it to the corner. But one of the neighbors across the street saw him. My aunt knew about the theft because another neighbor had told her, but she didn't know who it had been. It was your nephew, the neighbor told her. But my nephew is sleeping. She checked Arturo's room, went out to look for him with just her robe on, and found him two blocks away, driving the truck. And he was a kid—10 or 11. He got so scared when he saw her that he slammed on the brakes and the truck stalled. And he had made my dad leave the party. And the party was at its best—this pest got us out of the party. So his friends started calling him truck thief [ladrón de camionetas]. And on the next day the police captain came to the house because he was friends with the family. This one was outside playing with several friends, so the captain asks my dad: Which one of these is the thief, so I take him to jail? And he started to scold him. But when the captain goes into the house, this one here tells me, I'm not scared of him. What is he doing here? He's not my dad. On his way out the captain looked at him again: Next time you'll go to jail. And he stared back at him: I wanted to drive. But you're too young to drive. And you're a thief. You've stolen a truck. But it was my dad's truck, he replies. Oh God . . . The things he's done to us. And my dad would just laugh . . . or just hit him with a newspaper.

Again, it seems as if the entire family revolved around him; and he seems quite insolent. When the police captain—a family friend—was brought to the house to scold him, little Arturo talked back to him. “What is he doing here? He’s not my dad.” He brazenly raised an issue of jurisdiction: no police captain could scold him in his own house. And when the captain accused him of stealing the truck, he reminded him that it was his own dad’s truck. It was not without arrogance that little Arturo invoked property rights to keep state authority—mildly personified in this gentle officer—out of family business.

I was raised by my father and aunts because my mother died when I was 3 years old. She was pregnant and while giving birth both she and my brother who was to be born passed away. So the two of them died and I was motherless at the age of 3. My aunts and grandparents on my dad’s side raised me. I lived with them in my dad’s house. There were three houses right next to each other (one was my dad’s and the other two my uncle’s and aunt’s). There was a big garden and a big yard. I can tell you that my childhood was good [Te digo que mi niñez yo la pasé bien]. We are five siblings, four women who are older than me, and I’m the last one, the fifth one, the most spoiled in the house.

II. Migrant Lineage

Where does he come from? Who is Arturo Gómez? His childhood stories tell something, but there has to be more. Migration is overwhelming, though: the past tends to get lost. Change goes unnoticed amid change; memories get washed away. And yet in the far distance there are glimpses of the past. During several meetings Arturo walked me through his Ecuadorian past. We talked about his school days and his work, first with his father and then by himself; we talked about meeting his wife and getting married, settling down and buying his first house; we talked about his life

in Guayaquil up to leaving for New York City. I also talked to his wife about their life together back home. Arturo's and his wife's migration to the United States can be traced several decades back to family members—the Guayaquilean flow north goes back to the 1950s. Arturo does not remember much about his uncle—he was 3 or 4 when he left Guayaquil for New York City. But this uncle was “very important for the family.”

I have good memories of my dad's brother, my uncle who came to live in the U.S. when I was young. He graduated from the business school [Colegio Mercantil] in Guayaquil. He came to the U.S. to work at an office; and unfortunately he was run over by a car as he was leaving the office here in Manhattan. A drunken driver got onto the sidewalk with his car. My mom died in December and my uncle in January—imagine. I don't remember him that much—but he was the right hand of the family. He wrote using stenography and knew English backwards and forwards. And he had many books. I got to use an algebra book that was his; both my sisters and I used it, and my son used it too. All of my uncles and aunts have beautiful handwriting [una letra lindísima]. They all studied at the Colegio Mercantil. My uncle came here because of a friend of his who lived one block away from our house. He had come to New York City and was working for a company, and sent for my uncle. Both had studied at the Mercantil, they'd known each other for years. My uncle had a good job in Guayaquil. I don't remember the company, but it was something about accounting. It was on January 12th 1957 or 1958 that he died. In Ecuador I have a picture of him. He wore one of those long, detective-style coats, and an old-style cap. A pretty photograph, black and white. I inherited his desk and some English books that I still have in the house. My son likes those books too. And he had such pretty handwriting. Back then the books were covered with Manila paper, and until I got married they

stayed impeccable on his desk—they never had a folded page. Allegedly he had the idea that the whole family would come to live here—he hadn't thought he was going to get promoted so fast where he worked. He was methodical and had everything in order. But we had our houses over there in Ecuador—the houses are still there. My aunt who lives here came to bring his dead body back to Guayaquil. He is buried over there—Gate 7 in the General Cemetery.

When Arturo finally took me to meet his aunt, he told me to speak loudly because she did not hear well; we rang the bell many times. She came to the door, moving slowly, small and fragile, wearing slippers and a bathrobe. The apartment is large: one big bedroom and big living and dining areas; the furniture is old. The building is one of the many six-story co-op buildings in Queens; it is rent-controlled, so the rent has stayed relatively low. Arturo introduced me as his friend, and then said that I was in school and helped immigrants and had some questions for her. We sat down at the table and began talking. She ignored most of my questions and repeated three or four phrases over and over again. She seemed to be in some different world, and partly because Arturo was sitting next to me, I found it difficult to play along. The interview only lasted 47 minutes because I could not do it anymore. As I listen to the recording, however, what seemed mere confusion starts revealing some patterns.

When I asked her when and why she had come to the United States, she told me about her dead brother; when her brother got killed in an accident in 1957 or 1958, her mother asked her to travel and bring the corpse back to Ecuador.¹¹⁷ She kept returning to her brother throughout our meeting. Arturo had already told me bits of her story, however: although she had come to bring her brother back, she did not settle in New York City until 10 years later.

¹¹⁷ I have been trying to find a reference to the accident in the NYC newspapers; so far I have not but hopefully I will.

She worked at an insurance company, La Unión Compañía Nacional de Seguros in Guayaquil. She was an accountant as well. One day she won a small lottery in Ecuador and went on vacation. The company's owner was German. And he told my aunt: How much do you want to earn? You tell me how much [Ponte tú misma tu sueldo] but don't leave. I know that if you leave you won't come back. But she told him that she was only going on vacation [sólo se iba a pasear]. And also my grandfather told her: Oh, my daughter, I know you're not coming back. And again she said to him: No, dad, it's only a vacation. But my aunt came here, stayed with some friends of hers, and then . . . She got to see the lifestyle [vio la forma de vida] and one friend offered her work. No, she said, I'm here only on vacation, and I don't have papers to work. That's not a problem at all, her friend replied. She started ironing at a company with her friend; it was better than staying at home the two weeks. But she liked it and then another lady took her to work at a cleaning company, and she stayed working for this company for 35 years—it was at 600 Madison Avenue, the building is still there. She didn't like the idea of working in Manhattan; she thought they would ask her for papers—but she was hired immediately.

Arturo's account shows that she did not come and stay in New York City because of her brother's death; between the first trip (when she came for her brother's body) and the second one (when she came on vacation and ended up staying) more than 10 years had passed. In her memory, however, the two trips get mixed up. In reconstructing her decision to leave Guayaquil for New York City, the first trip displaces the second trip: she makes it look like she came to the U.S. because of what happened to her brother. One obvious reason for the "confusion" may be that her brother's death left an enduring mark in her memory. But there is more. By tracing her migration to her dead brother, she may be suggesting continuity between her brother's

decision to migrate and her own; throughout the interview she kept referring to her dead brother as an exceptional young man. Moreover, the substitution of one trip for the other makes her decision to migrate more meaningful—it provides the otherwise absent rationale. Arturo's narrative of his aunt's story seems almost random: she is working in Ecuador, has a good job and a boss who wants her to stay, wins a lottery and goes on vacation, and never ever comes back. Migration is presented as completely unnecessary, an unexpected vacation that happens to extend into an entire life. By substituting this arbitrary plot for her brother's tragedy, she can restore meaning to her decision: migrating was something she had to do because of what happened to her brother—as opposed to something that just happened. This does not mean, of course, that she did not have reasons to migrate; but she does not seem willing or able to put them into words. After telling me that in Ecuador she was an accountant and made good money, she said, "It's just that I wanted a change of . . . environment [cambiar el ambiente]. I wanted . . ." And then she seemed to get lost in thought and said nothing. I asked her what the problem was in Ecuador: "None," she sternly cut me off.

As she talks about her life, common immigrant themes take saliently sharper tones. Things here are different. It is all about the money. Any job is good. The more you work the better. When Arturo had told me about his first jobs in New York City, I was surprised by how quickly he had learned the basics of immigrant work. Now I could see who his teacher or model had been. Much of what Arturo had told me about work sounded like a softer version of what his aunt had to say.

So when I came here my friend tells me, do you want to work? There I was an accountant, it wasn't the same as here. Here everything is different. Stay, my friend told me, and I did stay to work. I worked cleaning offices, from 5 pm to 12 am. When I went to the company's office—my friend sent me there, she said they were hiring. But I

don't have papers, I told her. Go anyway. So I went to the office and this very polite person—he was Cuban—lowers his voice and asks me, listen, daughter, are you a resident? No, what I have is my passport. Hide it, hide it. So he sent me to 600 Madison Ave and I started working cleaning offices. I cleaned the Luxor offices, at night. In the beginning I made about \$5 an hour; then they would raise it, and when I retired it was about \$20 an hour. I worked day and night. So then another friend told me, do you want to work? Me? I'll do anything. Ironing. I don't care. The thing is the money. There I was an accountant. But here it's not the same. I worked at night and during the day I ironed at a factory. I made \$150 or \$200 a week, ironing. And my supervisor at the cleaning job would ask me, do you want to do overtime? Anything is good, I tell him. I work my hours and then I work overtime: more money for me. OK, I'll get it for you. So then I would bring a little present for him without anyone noticing. You always have to give something to these people. And I spent years there, quite happy [muy feliz y contenta]. More than 30 years. And I didn't want to retire. But one of the supervisors told me: Stop working, you'll get a good pension. I get a pension from the union and one from social security. And they raise it every year. It's about \$4000. Monthly. Easy [Tranquila]. That's what I killed myself working for [para eso me maté trabajando], even if it rained or snowed. And back then it was very cold.

It has been many years now since she has retired, so when she said she had been working, I was surprised: “About two months ago they called me and asked me if I wanted to work an extra shift [una extra]. When? On Monday. So I went to work. They call me when they want me to work, although I've told them I can't because I'm babysitting at home.” Sitting across the dining table, Arturo's eyes tell me she is making things up. Her life has been entirely oriented toward work: how could her old-age delusions be about anything else? Even when telling whoever is calling her that

she cannot work anymore, she mentions another job (her made-up story about someone calling her to work in cleaning includes her own made-up excuse: babysitting). Work is all she talks about. She never married and does not seem to have friends (when I asked her about friends, she said no: “I worked day and night”). And when I asked about her coworkers, she suggested that the environment was tense: “They saw that I talked to the supervisor, and they thought that I told him everything about them. I laughed them off. But there are things I did tell him: some people didn’t do anything, sitting down all night and talking on the phone.” Additionally, several incidents with immigration police made her wary of going out and interacting with people she did not know. She told me about being stopped and asked for her papers at least three times, even though it does not look like it took too long for her to regularize her immigration status. Finally, mistrust is associated with envy—it is envy of others’ success that prevents friendships among immigrants. And envy actually makes an intriguing appearance in her dead brother’s story—her own story’s corner stone:

He spoke English like he spoke Spanish. He was well educated, accounting and everything. Well prepared. And I don’t remember what year it was that this disgrace [desgracia] happened to him. He was killed. So I had to come to see him and bring his corpse back. He had a very good job here. He spoke English like he spoke Spanish. He was well educated. And this happened to him. I brought the corpse back. My mom cried. Don’t leave my son. He was her favorite son. He was a boy—didn’t drink or smoke. He wasn’t that kind. A disgrace [Una desgracia]. A car ran over him. When we learned about it I flew to see him. Oh my God it was so sad to see him [qué tristeza más grande de verlo]. I brought the corpse back to Guayaquil. He was well educated. He spoke English like he spoke Spanish. He was an accountant. He had a good job here. But the problem [el chiste] here is always envy. Envy. He was well educated, had a good job. People were envious of him.

Arturo's family's history of migration to the United States goes back to the late 1950s (uncle) and has its second chapter in the late 1960s (aunt and soon sister). Arturo's father, on the other hand, never thought of leaving his native Guayaquil. When talking about his childhood, Arturo mentioned their three houses, one next to the other. One was his father's and the other two were his uncle's and his aunt's. In my interview with her, she kept coming back to these three houses. "My brother told me that we should try to get one of the Social Security [Seguro Social] houses. And we got so lucky that they gave us the three houses we asked for: one for my brother who died, one for Arturo's dad, and mine." Arturo's uncle soon left for New York City and died in an accident. About ten years later, in 1969, she came to New York City on vacation and has lived in Queens ever since. Arturo's father—his name also Arturo—still lives in his Guayaquil house. He is older than his sister—but the family says he is in much better shape. "He's laid-back [tranquilo]," María Delia (Arturo's wife) told me about her father in law, "he likes his music, his drinks [su trago bueno]. He collects LPs, and he likes dancing. This year he's turning 91 and still thinks he's 15." I asked Arturo whether his dad had ever thought of following his brother and sister to New York City:

He never thought about it. Although he had friends living here—some have already died—who had their own businesses and told him to come. He never liked the idea of coming here. I have my things here so it's better to stay here than keep going back and forth. Never. He never grew that wish of coming to the United States [Nunca le dio ese deseo de venirse a los Estados Unidos].

It has been more than 8 years since Arturo saw his father for the last time. What exactly is "that wish" he says his father lacked? Why did he not like the idea of coming here? How was Arturo's father different from his brother and sister? Why did

they have “that wish” that he did not have? How is Arturo—the only boy—different from his dad? His father did consider visiting friends in New York City, Arturo told me, but never moving here. He had his “things” in Guayaquil and did not see why he should leave them behind. He might have had other plans.

III. Regional Divide

I don't want to be presumptuous but my father always sent us to good schools—private schools. The school I went to—a private school—still exists today: Instituto Particular Abdón Calderón. That school was very famous. I lived in Southern Guayaquil and the school was in the Northern part of town, but there always was a school bus, and a teacher in each bus. At the Abdón Calderón I received my first communion. The Jesuit fathers from the Colegio Javier celebrated mass for us. Once I won a scholarship—half scholarship—and also a religion award about the Bible and that kind of things; they gave me a rosary that had been blessed by the Pope—the beads made of olive pits. I still have it. After school I moved to the Colegio Javier to keep on studying.

Arturo must have started elementary school around 1960. I can see his school online: “With more than 60 years of educational history [trayectoria] in the country, IPAC has stayed as leader in the training [formación] of the Guayaquilean childhood and youth.” How many generations have gone through since Arturo? The website promises “an academic education complemented by sports, drawing, dance, theater, cultivation of values, religious education, and appreciation of the environment and the human being.” Abelardo García—the school founder and principal when Arturo attended—is no longer in charge, and the school has moved from its “modest” location downtown to “large and modern facilities” in one of the most exclusive Guayaquil

areas (Samborondón). What is the first memory that comes to mind when he thinks about school? After locating his school in the Guayaquil landscape—good, private, famous—he locates himself within the school: the half scholarship, the religion award. And to make his memories real he immediately produces something tangible: the olive-pit rosary—he still has it—is hard proof of another time. The present threatens to deny the past—the standard for evidence rises. The rosary—the physical referent of prayer—is also the physical referent of his school days.

On school vacations I would go to Customs [la Aduana]. My dad was a Customs Agent; he did all the paperwork to move merchandise through Customs. I'd get out of school and go to the port to work with him. That's how I started learning. I was the youngest one, so people in the port offices helped me with the forms. The first time I was paid for my work was 100 sucres. For me that was money—5 sucres was enough, imagine 100. With 100 sucres I had enough for a month—I could do whatever I wanted and there still was some left for the next month. It was our own currency [Porque era nuestra moneda].

Arturo's reference to sucres as "our own currency" is confusing. It may be just to remind me that back in the day Ecuador still had its own currency, and that is why he got paid in sucres (Ecuador abandoned sucres for American dollars in 2000). But the reference seems to go farther—it suggests that the amount was important precisely because the dollar was not yet the yardstick to measure your earnings. It would not take too long before Arturo's aunt discovered the magical power of exchange rates (explaining his aunt's migration to New York City, Arturo mentions the power of \$100—in New York City you could make as much in one week as in Ecuador in one month). Moreover, and because of his job in the foreign trade sector, Arturo would always be exposed to the impact of exchange rates. But this first earning was in sucres.

There was a time, Arturo seems to be saying, when sures were sures—and that could be enough.

As much as he liked this job, however, it would not be his first choice after high school. Upon completing his third year with the Jesuits, Arturo transferred to the Naval Academy. His military career would not go beyond the rank of sublieutenant conferred at graduation from the Academy; but the attempt stands out in the narrative. “So after school,” he says, then stopping suddenly. I expect him to talk about following his father into the import and export business. He has been preparing for that; it would go with the narrative. And yet he pauses for almost three seconds. He is looking for something else. As if unfolding some hidden piece of memory against the torrent of his story, Arturo remembers other plans. Most of the time the story moves forward choppily but without major detours; he is destined to take over his dad’s niche at Customs. Now it deviates from the flow almost abruptly. “So after school . . .” Three long seconds pass. “It was then that I said no, no, no. I decided to go into the Navy.”

I transferred to the Naval Academy because I always liked the idea of being a seaman. But then I had some issues with my eyes. I wear glasses for myopia; and navy men can’t wear glasses. That’s the problem I had [Es la dificultad que uno tiene]. I got to be sublieutenant. And I retired because I couldn’t keep going—I wanted to join the naval aviation. I liked being a pilot. One time I was little I disappeared at the Guayaquil airport—my father and aunts got scared. I had sneaked onto one of the planes. Back then the company was PANAGRA flying Ecuador-NYC—it was very famous. A flight attendant took me off the plane. My whole life I’ve liked aviation. But you know that’s the way life is [por cosas de la vida]—because of my shortsightedness I couldn’t do what I liked.

Who did Arturo say “no, no, no” to? Himself? His father? His attempt at deviating from his father’s tracks would not succeed. But he tried. Arturo’s brief military career—three school years from cabin boy to sublieutenant—stems from his childhood fantasies and craving for adventure. Not long ago he read in the papers about an Admiral Espinoza—the two of them grew up in the same neighborhood and were comrades at the Academy. The reference to the Admiral suggests how things could have been. “It’s funny how life is; the two of us might have been there now.” I asked Arturo about leaving the Navy: “I was quite disappointed.” But why did he leave? Was myopia the only factor hindering his naval pilot career? The Admiral was in the paper because of political troubles with the President. Myopia may have thwarted his military career—but it was not the only obstacle.

Most people in the Armed Forces in my country are from the highlands [gente de la sierra]. They always give people from the coast a hard time [Los serranos siempre le dan duro al costeño]. The police, the Navy, the Air Force, the army—they are all from the highlands [serranos]. If someone from the coast makes it there—I remember there was a relative of ours who had been in the Navy, they gave him a really hard time. Many people quit because of the internal problems.

Arturo explains quitting the Navy in terms of his physical unfitness. Soon enough, however, he lowers his voice—there are people from the highlands living in the house—and expands into the politics of regional conflict within the Armed Forces. People from the coast, he says, never have an easy time in the Quito-controlled military. Admiral Espinoza’s current political problems with the President show it again: the federal government has always been hostile to Guayaquil natives. The forces of history come to the rescue. Against the long and deep backdrop of

Ecuadorian inter-regional rivalry, his physical flaw fades. Even if his eyes had been good, he suggests without saying it, the Navy was not the right place.

I went into studying foreign trade. I followed my dad [Seguí lo de mi papá]. My dad worked for the import company that distributed Ford in Ecuador; the owners were the Estrada family. They also imported and distributed General Electric products—all kinds of appliances: fridges, stoves, anything there was at that time, Johnson off-shore motors for fishing or sport boats. I started working as my dad's assistant. And then no one noticed and I got my Customs license myself. And I also started working with a friend of mine who had his office. I worked with my dad and I worked with my friend: the two places.

After flirting with an adventurous life in naval aviation, Arturo withdrew back into his father's fold. He started working as his dad's assistant at the Ford importer and distributor, where people called him "Junior." Still eager to find his own place, however, he was soon working with a friend of his; and before long he would start his own company. And yet the question remains: Why did he give up on his military plans? Why did he go into his dad's line of business? After discussing the strife between the coast and the highlands, Arturo locates himself in the conflict: "We've suffered it ourselves [Nosotros hemos sufrido en carne propia]. You suffer because of the country [Tú sufres por lo que hace el país]." The regional divide makes it difficult for someone from the coast to make it in the Armed Forces; he cannot be the pilot he wants to be, he cannot fly over the regional lines. He must stay where he is.

So "you suffer because of the country." And yet he adds: "But if you know how to find your way, you can still do your thing [Pero si tú sabes manejarte tú puedes tener tus cosas]." The higher roads may be blocked, says Arturo, but there are options. The private sector—in this case particularly private, the gatekeeper being his own

father—offers an alternative. For this Guayaquil native, the coastal economy can make up for the closed doors. And yet the private sector where Arturo finds solace for his dashed aerial dreams is no stranger to the state: Customs agents are located right at the intersection between international trade and state authority; their job is to grease the hinges between the two. The change, however, is clear enough. He has moved from sublieutenant in the Navy to working in an office as his dad's assistant; from naval pilot carrying the flag over the regional differences to Customs agent sneaking imported goods through porous state walls.

These are the early 1970s. After Ecuadorian oil exports rose sharply in 1972 and 1973, so did Ecuadorian imports. Arturo does not mention the moment, but the wind must have been favorable for someone working in foreign trade. Arturo does, however, mention General Rodríguez Lara, the military president inaugurated in 1972—the year Arturo turned 18 and started working with his father at Customs. When discussing centralism in the Ecuadorian Armed Forces, Arturo alludes to General Rodríguez Lara as the General who “went around with the Arabs posing on a camel for the reporters.” Taken on the occasion of Ecuador's admittance to OPEC in 1972, the pictures showed off the ties with the Arab world that came with Ecuador's new role as oil exporting country. Arturo's tone suggests skepticism: there was something pretentious about the pictures. And they anticipated an economic era where oil would take over from coastal commodities as Ecuador's main source of external income.¹¹⁸ His reference to General Rodríguez Lara—ironic but not too harsh—expresses the ambiguity of the moment. The glories of the oil boom carried along the

¹¹⁸ I learned about the intersection between oil and politics in the Ecuadorian 1970s from Philip (1979) and Brogran (1984).

coast's relative fall. Customs agents, however, must have immediately benefited from increased international trade.¹¹⁹

IV. María Delia

At 18 Arturo started working with his father. At 20 he got married. He had met his wife when both were high school students. Almost 40 years later he remembers the details happily. Arturo is devoted to his wife. His voice softens as he tells me they have been together for 36 years now.

She studied at a convent school, the Sacred Heart. I met her because her sister lived one block away from my house. One Saturday I was driving around with two friends and I saw her. She was talking to two other girls outside of her sister's house. I stopped, backed up, blew my horn, then sped up, and then went around the block and came back again. They went inside the house, saying we were bothering them. A man came out and we left. A classmate of hers lived across the street from my house. She told me her name: María Delia. Then one time she sold me tickets for her school fair

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Ecuadorian Foreign Trade in the 1970s

Year	Exports (X) \$ M	Oil %	Banana %	Coffee %	Imports (M) \$ M	X + M \$ M	X + M VAR %
1970	190	0.5	43.8	26.3	274	464	17.7
1971	199	1.0	44.3	18.1	340	539	16.3
1972	326	18.4	40.2	14.4	319	645	19.6
1973	532	53.1	13.9	12.3	397	929	44.1
1974	1,124	62.0	11.3	6.0	678	1802	93.9
1975	974	65.5	15.5	7.3	987	1961	8.8
1976	1,276	65.7	9.2	17.1	958	2234	13.9
1977	1,436	50.0	10.3	12.2	1,189	2625	17.5
1978	1,557	47.8	10.1	17.8	1,505	3063	16.7
1979	2,104	54.4	7.2	12.1	1,600	3704	20.9

Source: Acosta [1995] 2001: 351-61

[kermés] and I went with some of my friends. And so it went. And sometimes they invited us for the sweet 15 parties—they took us as gentlemen. The whole guard was from the Naval Academy. Fifteen gentlemen. We presented our sabers as the birthday girl walked through the guard.

I had met María Delia when I stopped by their place to talk about the cleaning job with Arturo. She had mentioned several relatives of hers that had migrated to the United States, so I wanted to talk to her. When finally I asked Arturo to do an interview with her, he said yes—but it would have to be Saturday or Sunday because she works all week. When I turned the recorder on she asked me if I was going to write a book. “Maybe,” I said. She asked me if I was going to use her name. “Of course not,” I overreacted, “that’s forbidden,” as if my “forbidden” had any meaning to her. She answered my questions more fluently than her husband. She was more focused, perhaps more eager to make her case. Arturo was at home and sat down with us for most of the time. I worried because I wanted her to talk about him, but she did so anyway. Like Arturo’s, her family’s ties to this country go far back in time.

Most of my family has emigrated to Florida—most have papers now, many are citizens. Two of my older brothers came in the 1960s, stayed for 14 years, and then went back to Ecuador. They lived in Ecuador for more than 20 years, and then came back here because of their children. Back then it was very easy: you just went to the consulate and said you had some technical skill [título artesanal] and then you could come. Lots of Ecuadorians came this way; and I know many who’ve lived their life here [han hecho su vida] and have had luck. They got paid well for their labor and our country still used sucres for currency—\$100 was money. All of these people made money. They bought their own houses, built houses, they are all pretty well off [económicamente están bien].

Here is another reference to sucres—“our country still used sucres for currency.” When Arturo emphasized that his first job was paid in sucres, his point was that back then sucres still had purchasing power; the dollar had not become the ultimate yardstick yet. His wife’s reference to sucres is nostalgic as well, but the angle is different. Because Ecuador still had its own currency, she says, American dollars could go a long way. Thanks to favorable exchange rates, immigrant money made an important difference. She talks about lots of Ecuadorians who came to the U.S. and were lucky, making money and building houses in Ecuador. In addition to high exchange rates, they benefited from a better economy and the relative scarcity of immigrants—Ecuadorians and otherwise; they had luck. An implicit contrast between the good old days of Ecuadorian migration and the present organizes her account. When later in the interview I asked her how Ecuadorians did in New York City, she said “it’s not anymore that United States where you could come, make money, and go back home.” And the dollarization of Ecuador’s economy is important to her understanding of the change. Because I am from Argentina, we compare the economic crises in our countries: “But at least you’ve kept your own currency,” she says.

The distinction between early migrants and more recent arrivals runs through her family; she and her husband are among the latest to come. She has three siblings and then four more who are older and from her father’s first marriage. Out of the eight of them seven are alive; only two in Ecuador. “In Ecuador is my sister whose husband got his PhD here; then he worked for the OAS and was appointed consular attaché—now he works for Correa’s government. And also I have one brother who’s now very old; he’s the only one who’s never lived in the United States, not even visited.” Five siblings have left: one is in Venezuela and four in the United States. Besides her and the two pioneers who are still in Florida, her closest brother lives in Syracuse: she mentioned him when I went to their house for the first time. He emigrated when he

was 22, first Chicago, then Miami, now upstate New York. “He’s always been very hard-working, that’s why he emigrated to this country. He’s a mechanical engineer but never practiced, he likes doing business [le gustan los negocios].”

It’s going to look like the United States is our land [la tierra de nosotros]. Today there’re more than 30 relatives living around Fort Lauderdale. I also have family in Boston—we’re spread out. And actually my grandfather came to live here when he married for the second time. He’s buried in Coconut Grove in Miami. He emigrated right after he divorced my grandmother. He was a jeweler and watchmaker. He was a hard-working man [muy trabajador]; started off from scratch and made a lot of money. He sent his children to the best schools, even abroad. That’s why my dad spoke five languages. He went to the best schools in Ecuador and traveled to Chile and many other places. We used to tell him he was a rich kid [un niño rico]. My grandfather had lots of property in our country. But he fell in love for the second time and separated from my grandmother. And then to put distance between them, he and his new wife emigrated to Miami. And here he had more children. He would visit Ecuador often, though, and would always help his children out. One of my aunts used to tell us that when she got married her dad gave her a pile of cash [un cerro de billetes]. And she would see how the mountain would shrink; her husband didn’t do very well. It was sad to open the drawer and take out one bill [sacar un billetito]. In my grandmother’s house—they only kept one house after having had lots of houses—there were marble things and antique chairs that they’d brought from Europe. My aunts went to the best schools, they played the piano. But no one really had their head on their shoulders—they squandered it all.

After Arturo’s uncle was run over by a car as he walked out of his job one winter evening in Manhattan, his body was brought back to Ecuador and buried in

Guayaquil's General Cemetery. In contrast, the mythical grandfather María Delia talks about is buried in Coconut Grove. How to handle the bodies of immigrants that pass away must have always been an intricate question for the family members who survive them. This grandfather is the only member on either side of the family to be buried in the United States. Arturo's uncle had not been here long when he died. Arturo's aunt has been in Queens for about 40 years, but not having had children it is likely that her body will be brought back to Guayaquil as well (someone will bring back her body as she brought back her brother's body 50 years ago, possibly her niece). It would seem that neither one of them put down enough roots for their family to consider not shipping their bodies back. Their migration experiences—one of them cut short by the car accident—were always tentative. María Delia's grandfather, on the other hand, left Guayaquil for Miami to put behind his divorce and start off his new life. More importantly, he was rich. Unlike Arturo's uncle and aunt, he did not come here to make money but to spend it. Money bought him the right to be buried in Florida.

There is something legendary about this rich grandfather: María Delia did not get to see much of the fortune. As she puts it, the money got squandered, and her childhood was comfortable but not lavish. Unlike her father, she was not rich. The wealth reached her through stories: the pile of bills, the house his grandfather gave to his first daughter when she got married. She did, however, live in one of his grandfather's properties: "My grandfather owned an apartment building on one of the main avenues in Guayaquil, so all of his sons with their wives lived there. But no one wanted to pay for maintenance, and thus little by little the building was running down." Like her grandfather, her father was a jeweler and a watchmaker, but never as successful or hard-working as her grandfather had been.

My dad never gave us affluence. Moneywise he was always restricted [muy limitado]. When I grew I'd tell him, why are you like this, dad—if you were a rich kid? But he

was an open man, affectionate, respectful. Dad, I need you to read “Romeo and Juliet” for me, I said. Please, dad, don’t be mean. Come here—I’ll do a summary for you—but you write it down. And he talked and talked and I wrote and wrote. Languages . . . I’m telling you: five. He studied at the German School [Colegio Alemán] in Quito. He knew Italian, French, English . . . My childhood was not bad. I’m the youngest one of my siblings, and my brothers always did well financially. They always saw after us. Nothing was missing in the house. My dad was in charge of food and education. We all went to good schools.

Her father provided her with the basics: food and education—and Shakespeare summaries. Her brothers sent money home from the United States. Her brother now living in Syracuse, in particular, always contributed generously. Did her father ever think of migrating? “He hated it. Never. My brother did everything to bring him: Dad, you can make lots of money. Nooo. I’m not going to give my lungs away to those gringos [Yo voy a dar mis pulmones a esos gringos]. I’m not going there. I’m fine here—here I will die.” She remembers her father affectionately: “It’s not that I worship him, but he was a man who knew what to do.” Her mother, on the other hand, somehow resented her husband: “As a woman she felt hurt. Maybe after 5 years my father would finally tell her, I’ll change you the dining room set.” Those house details—he never paid attention. His migrant son was very different. Father and son competed.

Our home centered on our mother. And my brother always was doing well—because he had worked since he was 16. He was the type of person who saw what was needed in the house. So, for example, if he thought the fridge was too old he would change it. Then my dad would get jealous and buy a new stove. We went on vacation somewhere—my brother had the house painted. My dad didn’t see the point: What did

you paint it for? My brother would change my mother's lamps. His life was always his mother. And then when I grew up it was me. My mom thought of my brother in Syracuse as her only son. He was the sky, the earth, her breath. It's that you have to acknowledge he was a good son for her. In spite of migrating he never forgot his mother. There was always the phone call, always the money; always the dedication to her. If someone was traveling to Ecuador—he would always send something. My mother missed that son who left so much. She suffered so much all her life [Un mundo sufrió toda la vida].

Father and son competed for the family leadership. From early on the son worked hard to make money, and at 22 he left for Chicago. Soon he was able to outspend his father, taking care of whatever needed care in the house and providing for all of his mother's wishes. He never forgot her or his family. She appreciated it—he was her favorite son—but suffered all her life from his absence. The absent son outcompeted his father, or so it seems, but the competition took him far away from home. He has lived in Syracuse for the last 25 years. He never married (maybe he was too generous and women only wanted his money, explains his sister) and has very few friends. “He doesn't like hanging out with Ecuadorians, or Latinos,” his sister says, “and has almost forgotten how to speak Spanish. He works all day and then gets home and sits in front of his computer.” Two worlds clashed at home, silently: the father invoked his appreciation of literature and the memories of his privileged past—the son provided new appliances and dreams of future comfort. “My brother is very American,” says María Delia, and her father hated the United States. One left, the other stayed. And the mother—the prize of the battle—resented the one who stayed and loved the one who left. The son may have defeated the father, but it was expensive.

With so much family in the United States, María Delia herself traveled to Florida early on. “I’ve been traveling to the United States since I was 18. I was still single when I came [Vine soltera] to Gainesville, Florida, for six months, to study English. My sister lived there with her husband; he was getting his PhD in Agronomy.” (This is the husband that would eventually work for the OAS and the Ecuadorian government up to now.) “I liked it, I won’t deny that, but it was the first time I was away from home. When you come for the first time everything looks pretty—you like it, you think it’s paradise.” The Gainesville adventure, however, was soon cut short. “My dad’s health got worse and because I’m the youngest they had me go back.” For better or worse her life got back on track. “My father died and I was left alone with my mother. But I had been involved with him [Arturo] since I was very young and we got back together. I married at 20. We settled down well in Ecuador, we were doing well.”

Before they actually settled, however, the family—their son had already been born—moved to Miami and tried to make it there. Many relatives on her side of the family lived in Florida, including the brother who is now in Syracuse. Both have good memories of these days and to some extent regret having returned to Ecuador. “We would have been really well off [bien arriba],” says Arturo, “I talk to my brother in law now and he tells me that had we stayed we’d have a company like his now.” “Maybe if I had been more mature,” she replies, but “I was too young.” They even got to buy a house in North Miami Beach. After eight months, however, the attempt was aborted. Arturo’s mother-in-law had come with them, but she did not get used to it: “Life here is very different, she had to be by herself too much, and she didn’t like it; it was too much change for her.” They sold their things and returned to Ecuador. Arturo makes it clear he did not want to go back. But once in Ecuador things were not bad.

Arturo went back to working at Customs, and as María Delia puts it, “we lived this way for many years [vivimos así por muchísimos años].”

V. Settling Down

Not long after returning they got their first house. I would have not heard this story were it not because one day I asked Arturo and his Guayaquilean housemate about President Roldós. The first democratically elected president after the 1970s military government, Roldós died along with his wife and cabinet members when his plane crashed in 1981, only two years into his government. The interrupted presidency and the never explained accident haunt Ecuadorians old enough to have lived through them. Never interested in politics, Arturo remembers the fatal day in thorough detail—May 24th, 1981, anniversary of the Battle of Pichincha.¹²⁰ When the housemate goes back to his room Arturo gets more personal. “Roldós was friends with us. He taught at the Colegio Vicente Rocafuerte, and we lived nearby. I always liked watching him because he was dressed all in white—white suit, white shirt. He was a gentleman [un señor].” And then he adds: “Thanks to Roldós I was able to buy my first house.”

I had a friend I went to school with who is of Arab descent [turco]; and the Bucarams are of Arab descent [turcos]. This friend's cousin worked nearby and we became friends, and one day he left a message with my secretary for me to call him. He had heard me talk to my wife about waiting in line at the Housing Bank [Banco de la Vivienda] to apply for a house on one of these rainy Guayaquil days. You had to open an account at the Banco Ecuatoriano de la Vivienda (BEV) and then fill out an application. And then you had to see whether they would give you the house. So my friend came to my office and said, Look, I'll come on Friday and bring something for

¹²⁰ The Battle of Pichinca (1824) was decisive in the war of independence between what would become Ecuador and Spain.

you to go to the BEV and see Father Daniel Temalé. He was the general manager—a priest [un curita]. Friday came, and he stopped by and said: This is for you, so you can use it for what you're looking for; it'll help. And I see presidential stationary from the Ministry of Interior [Ministerio de Gobierno]. It was signed by Dunn Barreiro, who was the minister under Roldós—before Roldós passed away. It read: Mister Daniel Temalé Manager of the BEV—that was huge [con esa carta tú sabes]. It was printed in high relief and all that. So I said no—I can't accept this [chuta nooo compadre]. But he insisted: Just go and do it. If they tell you anything—and they won't—you make a grand entrance and that's it [entras por la puerta ancha pateando el perro]. No—I stopped him. I'm not one of those. It's just a way of talking, he said. I just mean you have an open door.

My wife's sister came with us; this time we didn't go to the bank but to the office area where Father Daniel Temalé was. There were lots of people [Había gente . . .]. And all of a sudden my sister's sister-in-law's husband comes out from one of the offices. Nardo! What are you guys doing here? He's a lawyer and worked at the bank. I showed him the letter. You shouldn't be waiting, he tells me. He took us in to see the Father with him, saying we were with him. Look, this letter is as good as one to talk to the president; it's from the Minister of the Interior to Father Daniel Temalé so you get help immediately [para que te atiendan más rápido que inmediato]. I'm going to help you with everything in here. He gave our file to Father Temalé, who saw the presidential stationary, and said: You should have told my secretary. I am sorry, Father, I don't know how things work in here. Thank God I ran into him and he told us to come in. We're family, my relative said, my wife is his brother-in-law's sister. I told Father Temalé about my case, and he asked Nardo if he could go look at houses with us the next day. I told him where I wanted my house, one of the new developments

[ciudadelas] they had built, Los Sauces, near the airport). I'll pick you up with my driver at 8 in the morning and we'll go where you say.

I'd already been looking at the houses, so I knew which one I wanted. They were Spanish-style houses with brick façade and tiled roof—I was the fifth one to move into this area, you could hear the birds sing. When we got there, I told Nardo which one I wanted—a corner house. He looked at some papers in his briefcase and said it was fine. When the people who were working in the area saw the bank car, they all rushed to greet him. Oh Doctor [Licenciado], how are you? How have you been? I'm coming with my relative here; he's chosen this house over there. And then one of them says that house is already taken. What? I'm following instructions from Father Temalé. We want that house. He showed the letter with the presidential stationery and that was the end of it. Of course, Doctor, there's no problem at all.

Two different people helped Arturo get his first house from the state-owned BEV. First, his high school classmate's cousin got him the recommendation letter from the Ministry of Government. Arturo does not say how this person had access to the government (he mentions that his classmate and cousin were of Arab descent, as were the Bucarams—the powerful political family behind Roldós).¹²¹ Second, once in the BVE he ran into his “sister's sister-in-law's husband [el esposo de la cuñada de mi hermana].” (He mentions this five-link family chain easily and naturally; he is used to moving in large family networks.) This relative was a Roldós supporter and worked at the BVE. The combination of outside and inside leverage proved effective: by the next morning he had gotten the house.

¹²¹ I learned about the influential families of Lebanese descent in Ecuador from Roberts (2000).

Why does Arturo reconstruct the story in so much detail? Acquiring his first house was obviously important, but there might be something else. His report is thorough: the details lend the story an almost epic flavor. But what kind of epic is this? With presidential stationery for weapon, the “hero” finds his way through the aisles, finding an able guide (his relative) to the higher offices of the bank where the Father (and BVE chairman) welcomes him—the “hero” makes his will heard. What is the epic ingredient? The “hero” seems highly dependent on other people; other than navigating the mechanism friends and family have set up for him, there is not much he has to do. And yet he talks about it so vividly. When his friend offered him the letter and said that he would make a grand entrance, Arturo reacted sternly: “I’m not one of those.” But this initial reluctance soon went away; before long he felt entitled to choose exactly which house he wanted—and did not let anyone stand in his way. The “epical” flavor stems from this trajectory: he changed and the change was not easy; although he did not like the idea of benefiting from his connections, he was expected to do it (his wife expected him to do it). And he did it. It is the overcoming of his own resistance that gives the story an epic touch.

When I visited Arturo’s aunt in her apartment in Queens, she mentioned many times the three little houses from the Social Security [Seguro Social] she and her two brothers—Arturo’s uncle and father—had obtained in Guayaquil. Back then no one wanted them, she repeated, but now everyone does. Some 20 years later Arturo walked in his family’s shoes and also got his first house from the state. The BVE constructed houses and neighborhoods [ciudadelas] and allocated them to non-homeowners—in different ways. Without help he might have gotten a house as well, but not the one he wanted, and not so fast. “My friend told his cousin: you are connected to the government [metido en el gobierno]—help Arturo.” The conditions were very good and inflation would gradually make them better: “Back then with only

1000 sucres you could have your house, and then you paid the mortgage off for 25 years. But I took out a mortgage for 15 years—and it only took me 10 years to pay it off. You know how much I paid? You’re going to laugh—75 sucres or about 5 dollars a month.”

Informal connections to the state would also be central to Arturo’s work at Customs. After several years working with his father Arturo founded his own company—he was 26. “My company was called . . .”—and the name will not come to his mind; it takes him 20 long seconds to find it in his memory: “Gómez & Gómez LLC—Gómez for me and Gómez for my dad. No—it was Gómez, Gómez & Associates LLC—because I partnered with another guy [muchacho].” His father kept working for the Ford importer distributor, but had his own desk—and clients—at Arturo’s office. Arturo started off with two clients and got to have fifteen. He worked with seafood exporters, mostly fish and shrimp, and also palm hearts; he hired refrigerated containers that went to the plantations to pick up the merchandise. The job involved these logistical arrangements, but much of it was paperwork. When exports were agricultural or perishable, he had to get health certificates from the Ministry of Agriculture and other permissions before the merchandise was shipped out. For both exports and imports he had to stop by the Central Bank to get the authorization concerning the use of foreign currency. But it was the Customs officials that Arturo interacted with the most.

And you know we played with the prices. Let’s say back then a TV was \$40—we made it pass for smaller TVs that cost \$20. And we did the famous two x one shipments [embarques dos por uno]: we tied two boxes together and had them wrapped up nice like it was one box instead of two. So we did the transaction for \$20 instead of \$40—the money was split between the import company and the Customs people—the Customs boss [el jefe de Aduana], the inspector, the Customs administrator, everyone.

I learned all that because I was everywhere [como ratón de pulpero] and made lots of friends [Raymundo y todo el mundo]. And so I started my own office. You had to know how to deal [transar] with the people. I even got involved with the Customs police. The commanders—they already knew me. I would go with a suitcase and leave the money for them—I greeted them, sometimes on the weekends we'd go out to eat, or if I had something good I would invite them for a dinner—and we made the arrangements. Simple—but it's not that anyone can do it; you've got to know how to do it. It's not that they took money from everyone. If you went there they had you pay everything; all I hadn't paid they had you pay it. While working there I met many people, but there always were new people coming in. I had school classmates who worked for Customs. I remember Andrés Dorrego—he tells me, Arturito, what happened buddy [qué fue compadre], so people stare at me, what, you know him? Know him? We're like brothers. I tell him, look, Andrés, I have this merchandise, the deal is such and such. Is it your client? No, it's my friend's, I tell him, but he doesn't know you. So I'll deal with you [Entonces yo me arreglo contigo], he would tell me, I don't want anything with him—tell him to give you all the papers. So we went to value [aforar] the cargo, he looked at it and looked at the list of prices, and said, OK, they want this much, let's do it for this much. And he would say by himself, Arturo, this is for you—because I brought clients to him.

Arturo does not hide what his job was largely about, particularly regarding imports: located between the importers and Customs and other state officials, his task was to smooth out the customary but sensitive transactions between the two. At the forgiving expense of the National Treasury, the two sides agreed to undervalue imports, thus reducing the taxes to be paid, and sharing the benefits. Arturo and other Customs agents offered the companies their familiarity with the officials—and they

brought “clients” to the latter. Arturo makes it sound very natural, although he acknowledges the business took skill. A successful agent had to be well known and trusted—and discreet. Equally important, an agent had to be friendly and even warm; greet people the right way and make everyone feel comfortable. Affability was key to protecting and naturalizing these delicate transactions. It was particularly important when the parties involved saw each other as social equals. Doing business with social equals took tact: the state official did not have to feel threatened or diminished. Arturo’s childhood friendship with Andrés Dorrego, however, seemed to have made deals particularly easy, as the transactions were part of a broader interaction.¹²² It was even easier if family was involved:

At one point one cousin of mine—the economist Mariano Gómez Lara—was general treasurer in the presidency of León Febres Cordero; he was the president’s right hand, it was up to him what got paid and what didn’t. It was through him—he had his uncle get into the Customs Administration. Because he didn’t know Customs very well and we were family I helped him. So then I had my opportunity [entongue]—I brought him clients and told him who was good and who wasn’t. And it was through him that I got my import and export license at the national level—because the one I had was only for Guayaquil. It was very hard to get that; you had to have good money [buen billete] and I got it for nothing. This uncle of my cousin was the chief of personnel and was in charge of authorizing all this. So one day my cousin called me and said: Cousin, why don’t you come here. And he sent for me from Quito and gave me a government car—I was in Quito for about a week. And that’s how I got into some deals with him, and it worked out well for me [salí bien] and for him [y él también salió bien]. He got ahead,

¹²² Anthropologist Larissa Lomnitz (1971) wrote about the exchange of favors among the Chilean middle class in the mid-twentieth century. These “corrupt” exchanges, like all other exchanges, are regulated by norms of reciprocity, which determine not only what constitutes a legitimate exchange—what is exchanged for what—but also the form the exchange takes: the rules of etiquette, including questions such as timing and confidentiality. See also Lomnitz (1988) and Granovetter (2005).

and so did his brother; they started their own company—it's a big company they have now.

Whatever this business deal was about, it turned out well. One relative led to the other through the tight family network—and at some point the network was plugged into the state. Arturo describes his job naturally and confidently. “So I explained to my clients: if you do it this way you’ll pay this amount. Arranging with the people inside you’ll only pay this much. So they saw how it was.” The balance is positive: “Things got done, work got done. The more that could be done was done, and I did try to save something—to buy some property, pieces of land, my house, the other house, the house at the beach.”

VI. His World

Prosperity came through personal connections—and through personal connections it trickled down. The glimpses of Arturo’s adult life in Guayaquil suggest comfort and well being. But he was not the only one who benefited. He remembers, for instance, venturing out of his neighborhood to help those less fortunate, at least at Christmas time.

For New Year’s and Christmas we would go out in three cars—my son and my daughter, my wife, my son’s classmates from school. We all made sandwiches and hot chocolate, brought cookies and all that, and went around the city, handing out food where we saw people that didn’t have much—poor people, people who were begging. We stopped at one corner, people gathered around us, and we gave them a good cup of hot chocolate, a good sandwich, a bag of cookies and some other little things. And

then we went on, stopped somewhere else, and then again we went on handing out what we had.

Christmas-like anonymous giving was not as important as helping the people who gravitated toward him—and there were several of them. When Arturo told me that their maid [“la empleada de nosotros”] still lived with them, I was surprised. “She’s still in the house, she hasn’t left. We pay her from here. We stretch the money a long way [como chicle] but we do it.” He told me she cooked for his son, the only one in Guayaquil, and soon enough distinguished his household from others: “In my country you don’t eat the same food as the maid [empleada]. She cooks for you and your family and then she cooks something else for herself. That’s the way most people do it. Not us. Only one food and that’s it.” Arturo and his wife did not keep the usual distance. The connection was “special,” and that helps him explain why she has stayed with them.

She’s also our goddaughter. We had her finish school. She’s a seamstress, she sews. She has her little room [cuartito], and we bought her a sewing machine. So people from our family and acquaintances have her sew for them. She makes some extra money [su platita extra]. Because I told her: I can’t pay you more. You know our situation, my situation, the problem I had here. If you want to stay in the house, that’s OK, if that’s your choice; or you can see if somewhere else you can get paid more. Who’s going to give her a room, the sewing machine, and also let her have her customers in the house? In other houses you serve the family and that’s it; they don’t let anyone else in the house. Here she’s in a good house, there’s no problem, she’s got everything at hand. And sometimes on the weekends she goes to her land, she’s from the province of Manabí. She comes back on Sunday afternoon or Sunday evening. She

has to have some freedom [También hay que darle su libertad a ella]. I tell my wife: she's been with us for a long time, it's already 25 years, my daughter's age.

Without getting into details, Arturo suggests that once the banking problems in Ecuador hit him, he had to reduce the maid's salary, or at least freeze it. That is why he gave her the option to leave, even though he knew she would not do it. It is clear that even today Arturo feels somehow responsible for her and her family. She and her family appreciate it—and he appreciates that they appreciate it. He takes care of them—they are grateful and loyal.

Here when they have sales I buy some clothing for her nieces—one is my daughter's goddaughter, the other one is my son's. And you know, when you give something to these people, they'll be grateful to you forever [viven agradecidos ante ti]. And more so if it comes from the United States. It's not that we paid \$100 or \$200, you know, but it's good clothing that you buy here. So when we send something to my son we include something for them: soap, toothpaste, sometimes food, Goya seasoner and things like that. I write a note for my son: give this box to her, the other to her sister, the other one to her other sister. So those people are always grateful to you; they appreciate it and for me it's no problem [a mí no me estorban]. And when I've needed them they've been on my side, in good and bad times.

His memories of his closest employees at his company convey the same concern: he wants to be fair and generous. As he talks about them, particularly two of them, his voice throbs with nostalgia and pride. In these two squires following him around Guayaquil—assistants and partners in crime—Arturo pictures the good old days. Enrique and Miguel were more than employees.

I've known this boy [muchacho] for years. His name is Enrique. That one can really help you with anything [para toda cosa]. I'd send him to Salinas—the beach. Enrique, you know what, here's the house key: go to Salinas and clean the house for me, and clean the cistern because we're going there. Next door I had a little house and sometimes he would tell me, Don Arturo, and I already knew what he was going to say: I'd like to bring my children here, at least for one weekend. I'll give you the key—no problem at all. Thank you, thank you, and he'd go there with his family. And his son helped me too; I had him work for me so he'd start doing his thing. I helped his brother who had an accident and is disabled. I would dismantle the merchandise boxes we used, load them in my truck, take the drive to where they lived, and hand it to them. And they'd use them to build their house [ellos iban haciendo las paredes de su casita] and then even built this place out on the road where people would go in the weekends to drink beer and listen to music. Enrique was sad when he learned I was leaving. I've always helped him. It's to this day that he goes by my house and asks for me.

Enrique was the kind of man you could count on for anything—always willing and ready. “He was perfect for me,” remembers Arturo. Like the maid, Enrique was not from the city. He lived outside Guayaquil on the way to Daule: Arturo refers to him and his family as “country folks [personas del campo].” In fact, Arturo was renting land from him to take his first steps into agriculture, a sort of hobby he had always liked (“I’ve always liked country life”). Miguel, on the other hand, did not call Arturo “Don Arturo” but simply Arturo; the difference is present when Arturo reconstructs the dialogues. To some extent Miguel was his social equal—and at the same time he was not.

Miguel was like my brother. He started working where I worked before setting up my own office. We became friends and then I took him to work with me. I told him, let's go; and he came with me. That's another one I'd trust with my life. Miguel, you know, I want you to go to the City Hall in Salinas and pay the taxes, the water bill, the phone bill, the firemen bill. All of that—he did all that for me. He still works in export and import trading, but tells me it's not the same, it's not like in our time, not like when I was there. I started working with him before my son was born, and my son is 30 now. One day before I left we were talking and he tells me, Shoot, Arturo, I watched your two children being born. And it's true. He was with me the two times my wife gave birth. And my daughter's birth was bad—my wife was about to die. That was an odyssey for me. That Friday, my God, I'll never forget it. And he was there with me. The thing is that Miguel drank. That's why his family—his sister, I remember his sister—they all appreciated me [me querían demasiado]. I kept him from drinking—I stopped him [le corté la raya]—although he still got drunk every now and then. But it wasn't like before. His family is always sending me regards and thanking me for all I did for him.

Solid and comfortable, Arturo's adult life in Guayaquil was supported by this informal staff following him around. In addition to working with him they helped him with the house at the beach—and sometimes joined him there—and took part in many other domestic chores and events. Arturo's emphasis on fairness was central to the arrangement.

When I made money I didn't keep it to myself; I shared it out to everyone, Enrique, Miguel, and another person who worked with me. Take it. This is for you, this is for you, this is for you. Look, I paid them every week, and this is what I did: maybe I had some extra money because we'd done some nice job for certain companies, and I'd

always thought of them, because they were next to me doing what they had to do. On Fridays I'd call them to my office one by one. First it was Miguel. Look, Miguel, this is your week's wage, and also take this. And what's this? This is for you. If you want to count it do it. And he tells me, this much? Enrique can come in now. Take this, your week's wage, and this is for you. Another one, this is for you. Everyone had his share. I didn't keep it for myself [Yo no me la llevaba solo].

Every time Arturo says “And this is for you” he knocks loudly on the dining table, mimicking the sound of heavy cash hitting his Guayaquil desk. It is the manly sound of his magnanimous past. “I’ve never been either stingy or mean; that’s why my wife says I’m openhanded. Maybe. But I always tell her: what goes around comes around [manos que dan reciben]. No one gives me money but I do get something [algo me viene]. Or maybe I don’t get anything but you do, or my daughter does, or my son does. One of us may receive something good [Entre nosotros que llegue algo bueno].” What does Arturo expect in return? Many of his references point to gratefulness and particularly loyalty—someone will remember him. The contrast is clear: “Because there’re people who are with you only when you’re doing well; when they see that you have money or are up there [arriba en la gloria]. But you’ve had a problem and you’re going under—then those people who greeted you so warmly barely wave a hand at you or even look the other way.”

These words bear the mark of his final days home. Surrounded by demanding personal connections, family and otherwise, Arturo had a difficult time when things went bad. His social world so tightly constructed, his financial problems quickly brought everything down. That is why loyalty—faithfulness—has become so important in hindsight. He saw his world vanish. His Guayaquil memories are shaped by the abrupt end of his Guayaquil life.

CHAPTER FOUR:
TODO TE SALE CAMBIADO
[NOTHING WORKS OUT AS YOU PLAN]

It was not so long ago that Arturo Gómez moved around his native Guayaquil at ease. He had his own company and his employees, some of whom helped him with personal matters, like taking care of the house in Salinas—at the beach. He paid them well and they appreciated it. Like his father, he was well known in the port, and his reputation was solid among clients and the Customs officials with whom he arranged the movement of merchandise. He drove his pick-up truck around, or had one of his employees drive him—from the city to Salinas and from Salinas to the land where he was trying some farming. It was many years ago that family connections had helped him buy his own house; then he had added a second and bigger house, and the house in Salinas. His wife took care of the children and many other affairs. Arturo's father was still around and helped in the office, or everyone happily pretended he helped. The children were headed to take over the business, studying or planning to study to get licensed in international trade. On the weekends Arturo liked having family and friends over, and he loved grilling crabs.

Bank problems and their aftermath brought this long crafted lifestyle to an end. Soon he left Guayaquil for New York City and everything changed. He had counted on his sister to lend him a hand, but she did not. He found work by himself at a supermarket, and then another job in cleaning. For the first time in his life Arturo had to do physical work. True, he will not put it this way, as he has always taken pride in fixing anything that breaks in the house. But these domestic tasks had not prepared him for the long hours of mechanical work; his accidents speak to his body's effort to accommodate the new rigor. Moreover, six months after arriving in the country his

immigration status expired. From then on, and again for the first time in his life, he would learn to live “illegally.” In moving from Guayaquil to New York City Arturo’s life turned upside down. Why did he leave? “In the beginning here I used to carry my company business card in my wallet. Look, I’d say, this is who I am in my country. People looked at me, what happened? It happens that many things happen in our countries. People don’t know. You never know why someone is here.”

I. El sábado me voy [I’m leaving on Saturday]

I had money at the Banco del Pacífico and . . . I’ve already forgotten. The certificates they gave us, you know, certificates of deposit, the famous CDs, that paper was of no use at the moment; they would call you little by little. And I also had money in a safe deposit box in the bank. One was Banco Continental, and the other . . . It was three banks that I had. So I couldn’t get my things out of the safe deposit box because the bank was closed. OK, they gave me the certificate, but to cash it you had to go to the AGD, Deposit Guarantee Agency, and see if you were on the list and when they’d give you your money back; what you had plus the interest. And this is money that wasn’t mine, I had to give it back to the companies I was working with.

I waited, then went there with my document to see if I could get my money, the part that was mine and my wife’s. But I wasn’t on the list, so you had to go to the famous chulqueros, the people who bought the CDs from you. Let’s say you had 15 millions sucres in your account, they’d say I’ll give you 5. You were not going to get your money back [Entonces tu plata, tú ya no ibas a recuperar tu plata]. OK, that was it [pasó], I had many problems, it was difficult to get back up with my things. Time went by and I slowly started working again.

But there were two bank holidays. And the second time was even worse. That time it was my debacle [mi acabose] because I had put my money . . . what's the name of this bank. The interest rate was good, that's why I put my money in that bank. I was confident that we were going to get back on track. And then this other government comes in and once again the darn bank holiday [bendito feriado bancario]. That time they killed me and killed other people [mataron un poco de personas]. And there are people who died. Because there were many Catholic high school teachers who were retired and had deposited their money in that bank. And that bank was working well. What happened? That once again they suddenly closed the banks.

I also deposited money in this darn Banco del Azuay: powerful people from the highlands. That bank went bankrupt too after some darn gangster from the bay area [un bendito mafioso de la bahía] bought it. But he bought it without using his name, you know, so he wouldn't be known as the owner. So that guy got [ocupó] the money from all the bank clients. One night people noticed trucks outside the bank and thought they were moving furniture and some other stuff: but they were getting the money in the trucks and taking it somewhere else—they went to Panama, Miami, Europe.

I also had my safe deposit box: in there I had dollars, because the money I made sometimes I put it there so not to deposit dollars in the account; and also my wife's jewelry, things like that. And when we finally could get in the bank and open the box—it turned out that my money in there was gone: it didn't exist anymore. And some of my wife's jewels were lost too. How did they do it? Don't ask me. I put in claims—but you know how bureaucracy is in our countries [los países de uno]. So I said no. This is wrong. That's when people stopped believing in banks.

There are no dates and the facts are not clear. The second half of the 1990s witnessed financial collapse in Ecuador. The banks he names have all left scars in Ecuadorian financial memory. A retrospective look at the crisis in Guayaquil's newspaper *El Universo* put Banco Continental—the first bank Arturo mentions—at the origin of the financial problems in 1996. As the 1990s came to an end, scattered problems combined and the crisis brought the entire system down. By the end of 2000 16 banks had failed and the economy had shrunk more than 10%.¹²³

Again and again, Arturo quotes the bank holidays as the cutting point driving him out of his country. The holiday, in Arturo's account, condenses the crisis; it is the key reference. He mentions the deposit freeze, which was the main point of the holiday; but it is the holiday itself—suddenly interrupting his life—that he stresses the most. And it was not only once. When he had recovered from the first holiday and things were starting to work again, “this other government comes in and once again the darn [bendito] bank holiday.” By referring to the financial crisis as the bank holiday, Arturo turns it into a one-day episode; it is something that happened, one morning like any other, randomly, far beyond human control.

After the deposit freeze was established, the money in his accounts was converted into “the famous CDs” (certificates of deposit). Arturo's first problem was that part of the money was not his. This could have created an intricate legal matter, but his clients understood the situation; they were having trouble with their banks as well. The incident, however, did harm Arturo's commercial network. His description indicates that business was done quite informally. Companies advanced him money so he could take care of moving their merchandise through customs. Sometimes he used his personal account for business, and sometimes his company's account for personal purposes. He was scrupulous and reliable: clients trusted him. When the money was

¹²³ On the banking crisis and the case of Banco Continental: *El Universo* (2006, 2007a, 2007b). See also Valencia (2004).

immobilized and he had to explain the problem to his clients, it felt as though his reputation got severely stained; the tissue connecting him to his business world suddenly ripped through.

Arturo's second problem, of course, was losing his own money. Identification in hand, he went to the Deposit Guarantee Agency (AGD) to claim what he had in his accounts, but he was not on "the list." The only option was the *chulqueros* [loan sharks] ("the famous *chulqueros*," he says, as he said before "the famous CDs," distancing himself from "*chulqueros*" and "CDs" and implying this was something extraordinary many people had to go through). The *chulqueros* bought his CD at one third of its nominal worth. His tone shows bewilderment as he makes clear what was at stake: "Your money, then; you were not going to get your money back." How did Arturo make sense of the loss? He does not offer much explanation—the bank holidays fell upon him like an unexpected disgrace.

The safe-deposit-box incident points in another direction. When the bank reopened, both money and jewelry were missing from the box. He still does not know what happened, but his understanding of the crisis starts to change. Bewilderment turns into suspicion. The financial crisis turns into an ordinary if massive theft. "One night people noticed trucks outside the bank . . ." This sort of urban legend—"people noticed"—reorganizes Arturo's account. Money disappearing in trucks is easier to understand than money just disappearing. Theft restores intelligibility and helps make sense of the loss. Money did not vanish—it was physically stolen—and therefore there are thieves to blame. Anonymous finance and orchestrated crime coalesce in strange ways: the references to crime dominate his account—but he accepts the loss as if it were the result of an earthquake or flood.

Arturo had problems with his money at the bank twice. But it was with the second "bank holiday" that "they killed me and killed many other people." And he

adds: “And there were people who died.” What does he mean when saying that they “killed” him—that this was his “debacle [acabose]”? Given his allusion to people who literally died, the reference to his own “death” must imply an economic or financial “death.” Indeed, Arturo’s account suggests that he was commercially killed, or so perceived it himself. His ties could not survive the blow, at least in his eyes; his place in business was not there anymore. What could he do? He gave some thought to selling one of his houses, but what was the point? “Selling the house, investing the money, and then the same can happen again.” He has suggested that he could have asked for help from relatives and friends; his wife told him so. But that is not what he wanted: “I told her no, no, no. I already feel I’m fed up [saturado]. So many injustices, so many problems. No.”

The emphasis seems to make up for reasons. What is it that he could not explain? Arturo felt “dead” and yet had to walk around pretending he was not. Closely connected to people both up and down the social hierarchy, his problems were immediately visible. He fled his own fall. Financial distress brought along shame—a loss of face that made it impossible for him to be seen by clients, friends, and relatives in the condition he was. “My family didn’t want me to leave. They cried.” But there was no choice. Numbed by some sort of moral fatigue, he did not think migration through. In spite of his family’s resistance, he departed almost overnight, leaving everything behind. His family did not understand why he was leaving—he could not make his case.

My wife was always against it. Don’t leave. No, I said, I’m tired of this, it’s been two times the banks were closed, two times the same problem. My wife says that I never thought of them, my children and her. No. It’s that if I stood in front of my children, and her, and said you know what, I’ve made this decision—I would never have come. They would still be trying to stop me. I told them three days before. Let’s say today is

Wednesday, I'm leaving on Saturday, I said. What? Yes, on Saturday I leave. I have decided it.

II. El error más grande de su vida [The biggest mistake in his life]

He got the idea [se le metió] that he wanted to come here to the United States. He comes here with the American dream. It's been the biggest mistake in his life—I always tell him so. Because really: we were not badly off, we had made our life in Ecuador. We had two houses in Guayaquil, one house at the beach. After being married for how long—more than thirty years? To change our life at this point . . .

Arturo's wife María Delia never approved of Arturo's leaving for New York City. In her view their situation in Guayaquil was not bad. When we discuss this point Arturo is sitting next to her, silently looking down: they have talked about it so many times. Her portrayal is critical but not unsympathetic; she never questions his authority, even when saying he was so wrong. But she does distance herself from his decision. "He always announced to me that he wanted to come. And he got his hopes up [Se ilusionó]." She makes it look like Arturo's migration to New York City was unrealistic and whimsical—almost childish. And yet at the same time she acknowledges—tiredly but somewhat sweetly—that the decision was not entirely out of the blue: whimsical or not, he "always" said he wanted to come.

When his wife is not present Arturo revives his own narrative. What did he have in mind? What was his plan? He insists that he counted on his sister to help him, and maybe his brother-in-law. Much in Arturo's account of his first months in New York City, however, suggests that he did not want to count on anyone.

My sister had told me that she had a friend of years who had a job for me, or would get me a job. I never even met this friend. I did it on my own. I took the risk. My hands

are not tied. No, no, no. I look by myself, asking and talking to the people. I imagined coming and working for one year—or two years—always sending money. I was living at my sister's, with my aunt. But I didn't like it because my sister was too controlling, as if I were still wearing diapers. I wasn't used to that. I've never had to report to anyone like that. I don't need to find out that much about my wife nor does she do about me.

His sister did not help him get the job she had promised. But it seems that he was not willing to tolerate much family interference. She was too intrusive—soon he could not stand living with her. Arturo never explicitly complained about his brother-in-law, so I asked. “I did have the idea of coming and working with him; I know his job and had the idea of doing some business. But I didn't tell him anything and started to do my own thing—I made my way by myself [solito]. And then I got this job at the airport and that worked out better for me.”

Arturo's wife stayed in Ecuador. The children were studying, her daughter just starting college. “We talked on the phone almost every day,” she tells me, “we got melancholy, I asked him to come back.” Two and a half years later she decided to come—her tourist visa was still valid—and here she stayed. Arturo was making good money at the airport, and got an apartment for the two of them.

When my wife came here she didn't have to work. I calculated how much I would make in the year, and told her that if she wanted she could babysit one or two children at home. It's easier for you: you don't have to go to someone else's place. Then she started helping a friend of ours who drove a school bus. It doesn't matter that she pays you little, I told her, at least you're outside, busy, not all day locked up in the house—she didn't know New York City. So one day the two of us sat at the table, I

opened a map of New York City and explained everything to her: this is where we take the train, that is the bus, here's where you get off and transfer to the other train.

One Sunday not long after getting to New York City she wanted to visit one of the big malls on Long Island. Arturo took the opportunity to teach her more about the public transportation system. "Let's go so you can see; you'll learn where to take the train. That mall is pretty; we walked around, looked at the Christmas arrangements, and then in there there's a store called Fortunoff that has such pretty decorations—oh God. I took her to see all of that." Arturo expands on the excursion to the Long Island mall and I am not sure why. I think he has gone off-track, but I am wrong; he is preparing the ground for what is next. It was after this happy day at the mall that Arturo and his wife finally talked—this is the sequence his memory has preserved. It was a conversation they owed each other since he had left Guayaquil.

She told me, Negro, your children are still young. You know that they've always been—I know. I know. Look, I told her, you are right. All I can tell you is that you are right. But I couldn't stand in front of my children and talk about this or that. Now that the two of us are alone I tell you you're right. I know that I was wrong to come here and leave the three of you: you and my two children—that I should have not done. But well. Let's leave that behind and look ahead—you'll see we'll get ahead.

The conversation was permeated with Arturo's good moment. They had enjoyed the trip to Long Island—the excitement of an American mall at Christmas time. His wife was already getting familiar with public transit in New York City. And most importantly he had an excellent job—at some point he thought he would work at the airport company until retirement. In that climate apologizing was easy. He could apologize and be assertive at the same time, admit that he should have explained why

he was leaving without saying that he should have stayed. Now that the situation has worsened, however, he cannot get away so easily. The question sneaks back. What was it that pushed him to leave Guayaquil?

His wife dismisses his decision to migrate as wishful thinking. But she recognizes that—wishful or not—the idea had been brewing in Arturo’s mind well before leaving Guayaquil. It is something he had always thought about. When comparing his father with his migrant uncle and aunt, Arturo says that his father never had “that wish” to come here to the United States. What is “that wish” about? Something about Arturo’s childhood and youth breathes restlessness. His childhood thefts—the delivery man’s donkey, his dad’s pick-up truck—betray an early search for means of mobility. His attempt at joining the Navy—rooted in his childhood love of aviation—speaks of the same search at a higher level: a naval pilot crossing the skies. A craving for space, or movement across space, informs these early choices. Once in New York City, in fact, his longing for movement has focused on public transportation: there is something almost sensual in his detailed explanations of the subway system.

The lust for moving across space involves an impulse to flee. Is it his family—too much love from his four older sisters? Where does the feeling of confinement come from? Or is it the social space that is too narrow? In so regionally divided a country as Ecuador, his attempt at deviating from the paternal path would not prosper. Did he feel cornered into his father’s niche? In a way, the work at the port was about movement across space as well; but it was merchandise that sailed through the Pacific ocean, not Customs agents themselves. How large was the social terrain in which he circulated? A friend got him a recommendation letter to get an appointment at the BEV (Ecuadorian Housing Bank). When he got there he ran into a relative who happened to work at the bank. It does not seem that the social field is too large. A

thick web of friends and relatives makes the field even narrower. Arturo's craving for moving stems from his sense of imprisonment—physical movement makes up for social circulation.

The way Arturo recalls, for instance, seeing his wife for the first time—she was sitting outside talking to friends, he aggressively chased her from his truck. The story of pursuit does not hide, however, the fact that she lived nearby; hunter and prey belonged to the same compact space. At work the tension felt more acute. He starts working as his dad's assistant, but soon is also working with a friend of his, and soon has established his own company. But owning his company provides only so much space. A Customs agent walks a thin line between his clients and the state. First, he must cater to the import and export companies, of which there are not too many (Arturo mentioned having around fifteen clients at the peak of his activity); this means each client merits personal attention. Second, the connection with the state bureaucracy is key—the activity is licensed by the state (a limited number of agents are authorized to operate) and the legal arrival and departure of merchandise relies on arrangements with the officials at Customs. Dense personal bonds are central to these deals.

Social warmth can suffocate. Embeddedness can stifle. He needs to belong and he needs to go his own way. When Arturo first tried to make it in Florida in the late 1970s, his in-laws were omnipresent, both enablers and obstructers. His brother-in-law (now living in Syracuse) helped them settle in and offered business opportunities. His mother-in-law was unhappy and put pressure on them to go back to Guayaquil. Family paved the way for him to leave and start something different, and family thwarted the plan. This time—more than 20 years later—Arturo managed to skip Florida (he flew there but did not stay). His wife still scolds him for that (“In Florida we’d be much better off,” she says). It was New York City where his uncle and aunt—his family’s

early migrants—had left traces. Their lonesome example—cutting themselves off from their world—resonates in Arturo’s voice.

How did Arturo Gómez become an immigrant? His answer repeatedly points to the banking crisis. Things go wrong and he needs air: an accommodating social space becomes oppressive; the niche turns into a cell. A tightly screwed piece of the ladder, he did not have much room to maneuver. It was not so much that the moment was difficult: it was difficult to deal with the moment. Migrating was not the only option: his wife knows it. The idea of leaving was old; bad times awakened it. As if underneath this most settled man—firmly rooted among his people—lay an adventurer eager to start over and carve out his own place. “My hands are not tied,” he said to himself before leaving, the war cry that opened an exit for him when his old life melted away. Leaving Guayaquil for New York City was going back to the wild. Not to depend on anybody: no relatives, no friends, no employees, no demanding connections to the state, not even his own name—only his own hands.

His wife says migrating was his “biggest mistake.” I ask him whether he regrets his decision; the question is not fair—he has been working all night. “Yes, I have to say I do. I never thought this was going to happen to me, the accident and all that, this whole problem. And you know in our countries one has family life.” But this is not him. Tired as he is, he soon changes gears and recovers. “It’s not that I regret it. My only regret is not having talked to my wife and children; told them that I didn’t want them to suffer.” He is back in the battle: “But well. Here I am and I hope to go on. I’ve never given up [*nunca he dado el brazo a torcer*]. What I set out to do, I want to do it.”

III. Esto no nos representa [This is not us]

One year after María Delia arrived in New York City Arturo lost his job at the airport. They had to leave their two-bedroom apartment for the room they have now (sharing kitchen and bathroom with four other men). The following year Arturo had his two accidents at the warehouse and was left out of work. When Arturo left for New York City they had been married for 24 years. She had been at the center of their little domestic empire: the children, the three houses, the maid. For the first time in her life María Delia started working outside the house: “I never worked before—and ended up having to work here [y vengo a trabajar aquí].”

I like working, but at the moment I'd like to have a better job. Babysitting, I'd make more money, I think I'd be better off. But this way . . . You know what the obstacle is here in this country? Documents . . . [Los papeles . . .] and language. I mean—it's not that I don't understand it, but I speak very little. And really my job. . . . I worked 11 or 10 and half hours a day. And I really don't earn enough. People think—our Latino people think—that paying \$100 or \$200 for taking care of one's child isn't . . . One sacrifices everything and I don't have . . . Sometimes you spend the whole day locked in the house. But Latino people are the first enemies of us Latinos. They think that they're paying well—not so. I started working with them one year after coming—the first year I didn't have the need to work so much: he had an excellent job. So I didn't have to work like this, I mean go and kill ourselves [o sea venir y fajarnos]. We had enough to live and send to Ecuador. But now after his accidents we all have to work. And I've worked there three years now.

For the last three years Arturo's wife has been working for an American-born couple of Latino descent, taking care of two girls at their place in Queens while they

are at work. The hours are long and the pay is low, and it has never been raised. She emphasizes that her bosses are Latinos: that is one reason why they are abusive and pay her so little. When she says that language (as much as papers) is the main barrier she faces in this country, she is complaining about being stuck working for Spanish-speaking employers. Do Latino employers pay less? Maybe—but it is also that working for them feels worse than working for anyone else. The abuse and disrespect she perceives at work partly stem from the unwelcome “familiarity” with her employers; she would rather work for someone farther away from her world. Talking about his wife’s work with Arturo some other time, I learn it is not only the money and the hours that make her unhappy. There is also a low-key but ongoing battle over who is in charge: “Maybe it’s raining and they want my wife to take the child out. And the child already had pneumonia. Do you think that’s fair? It’s stupid. And it’s not that she’s my wife—but my wife knows what she’s doing.”

María Delia makes it clear that this was not the life she expected, not the kind of life she used to have. “This doesn’t represent us,” she says. “We left things in our country and it looks as if we’d come here with nothing.” She is unhappy with her job, but has stuck to it for for three years now. Moreover, her dissatisfaction has different sides. Some complaints can be traced back to the proud housekeeper and mother she was in Guayaquil (she knows how to raise children and wants to be acknowledged). Her complaints about wage money and hours, on the other hand, suggest an immigrant in the making. She is changing—she has not changed.

The only good thing about this country is that you can do any kind of job. And no one thinks less of you [Y nadie lo mira mal y nadie lo menosprecia]. In our countries it’s all about what people will say [el qué dirán]. In our countries we have—let’s not say social position, because we all have an intermediate social position in our countries—but here we’re all part of the same pile [montón]. Here there are no social classes,

except for the very rich [la clase millonaria]. The middle class doesn't exist; it's not even taken into account. We're all the same. In our countries it's different. We're classified by social class, by what we do, our education, our neighborhood. Here no one cares [Aquí nadie le importa nada].

The distinctions she was used to are nowhere to be seen. “Here we’re all the same.” That is the good thing about this country: you can do any kind of job. She looks at me: “You’re well educated: would you go and wait tables in Argentina? In our country that is bad.” She says she does not care, though—“I tell you I’ve traveled so much that I don’t care anymore.” And this is what she has taught her children: “When you’re screwed no one will give you food or lend you one dollar—so take any job you find.” These are the lessons she has learned. “Here no one cares”—that is the good and bad thing about New York City. She is struggling to recreate an image of herself that fits her new life: as long as they pay you well you can do any job. And yet it is not enough. She keeps struggling to redraw boundaries around herself.

We immigrants come to this country to suffer [nosotros los inmigrantes venimos a sufrir mucho]. In this country you suffer too much. Too much. The way of life [sistema de vida] here is very different. People are greedy, it's all about money, and because of that people are mean. In this city you can't stumble onto anyone; on the bus merely brushing [rozar] someone—they'll give you the evil eye. I take the bus every day here on the corner. There are two blocks here before 37th Ave where American people live, Polish people, people who are well educated [gente preparada]. You see the nice buildings, the good people [buena gente] who go to work in Manhattan. I sit down on the one-seat row; I don't like the two-seat row in case you touch someone—no. I'd rather sit by myself, and I watch. And I see people's contempt [Y yo veo el menosprecio de las personas]. You've noticed that Mexican people don't lose their

habits [la gente mexicana no pierde sus costumbres]. They are notorious; they get on the bus with their children, and the children don't understand when you tell them not to do this or that—and that bothers people. Or maybe someone sneezes and they look at you like you're contagious—as if you had the plague. And the worst diseases are actually here . . .

Who is that woman looking at everything from her lonely seat on the bus? She sees people but people do not see her. She watches from the outside, but feels the tension. She is not like one or the other—she does not fit. And then it is the daily strife—the way people are. Examples rush to her lips.

If you're making noise [si está haciendo bulla] they'll call the police. And they're always waiting to see [pendientes] if you throw garbage or whether your dog is barking. No. No. No. It's too much. People here fight for everything—even at the laundromat. One day I went to do laundry. My husband told me to stand by the driers that are good. And then this woman comes so I told her that I was about to use them. Oh no I'm sorry but I need these, she told me and that was it. So I mean—there isn't that type of communication [no hay esa forma de comunicación].

That is not the way it was in Ecuador. “At least not in my case,” she explains. “In your country you look for people that match your status, right? And we mostly stayed at home. We don't care about who has or who hasn't; nor do we fight with the neighbors because you did this or that.” It is not so much that she was used to moving in a homogeneous circle—it is more that hierarchies were clear. In New York City there is no communication—she has a hard time interacting with strangers. Her sister-in-law (Arturo's sister, who has lived in New York City since the late 1960s) reproaches her: “She says I'll never accomplish anything here the way I am; because I

don't like quarreling [bronquear]." Arturo's wife stands her grounds: "So I'm sorry but then I don't belong in this city. I'm not going to change at this point in my life."

She bounces back and forth between Americans ("well-dressed Americans") and immigrants. Disdainful Americans on the bus to Manhattan upset her: "Excuse me," she would like to tell them. "We may come from a so-called third-world country. But we know about hygiene. We are educated. We are cultured. Education in our countries is much better than here [lo máximo]. And nonetheless they call us third-worlders [tercermundistas]." The "us" she has in mind, however, quickly becomes selective. "The cultures coming here are from below the middle and further down [las culturas que vienen aquí es de abajo para abajo]." That is why interaction is difficult. When confronted with disdainful Americans she brings her old pride back. When confronted with fellow immigrants she draws thick boundary lines. Two times an outsider, she does not find her place.

IV. Lonely Family Man

Arturo has found it difficult too: "There is discrimination here. And they try to put you down [Y te quieren basurear]. They think you are garbage." He confronts those he perceives to look down on him by showing "them" that not everyone is the same: there are many reasons why someone may have had to migrate. When he told me about how skillful one of his Guayaquil employees was with any sort of labor, I asked him whether he had never thought of coming here, where those skills would be appreciated. He quickly dismissed the idea: "These are people from the countryside," he said, suggesting they could never make it in the United States. Migrants may look similar—they are not. "Here there are medical doctors, engineers—but they don't have papers so they can't practice."

Carlos, for instance, our supervisor at the cleaning job. In Guayaquil he worked for the IRS [el servicio de rentas internas]—the government [la gobernación]. One day we were sitting down and talking at work, and he told me that. On Saturday it was his birthday, and he invited me. We went with my wife and stayed late; it was nice [pasamos bonito]. Look, he told me, one of these days I want to have you over for dinner. Maybe he thought I was something else. Another one from the pile [otro más del montón]. So I explained to him: Look, I told him, President Correa, the president now, he is actually my wife's relative. It's not that I don't have anything in my country. In my country I have my things. I have my house. But work is the main problem. What do I want my house for if I don't have work?

Carlos acknowledged the “difference.” That is why, in Arturo’s view, he invited him to his house and introduced him to his family. Socializing outside work signals equality. Only after Carlos invited him to his house did Arturo reveal his background—by now he knows that no one will be impressed at his old company business card. Arturo and María Delia, to some extent, are tuned in on the same struggle: boundaries must be redrawn. And yet there are fissures between the two. When she talks about Indian immigrants in nearby Jackson Heights, or about African-Americans, she knows she is on delicate ground: “My husband tells me that I discriminate against people.” Arturo often complains about people’s boasting about their background: it shows they do not know where they are. Right after complaining, however, he tells me he is related to the president, so as to make clear that should he want to boast he would not be shy. He reacts against boundaries and immediately sets them back up.

Arturo mentioned the family link to the president several times, then rushed to add that he had never wanted to take advantage of it: “I’m not looking to get a job

through him.” He compares job searching in Guayaquil and New York City: “Here it’s easier because in this country we’re all the same.” Back in Ecuador he could have found work through the president—but in the United States it is “easier” because “we’re all the same.” Before leaving for New York City he sent his CV around to several companies, but no one called him for an interview. “In our countries [en los países de nosotros] it’s all about your last name; whether your family is well-known [alta alcurnia]; and when it’s rich kids [hijos de papá] then forget about it. They did call me for one interview, but they had already selected their candidate.” Arturo benefited from family connections all his life (from working with his father to getting his own house). Now he presents himself as the system’s victim. It may be that “failure” has darkened his view. It may be that somehow he has always rejected his family’s embrace. New York City’s anonymous market is “easier” than Guayaquil’s accommodating web.

María Delia never thought that leaving for New York City was a good idea. If he wanted to leave, she says, he could have gone to Florida, where her family would have helped them. She never shared her husband’s enthusiasm for New York City (even in the good times, when he revealed to her the secrets of public transport, she showed little excitement: she was fine with the bus but hated the subway). About five minutes into my first interview with her, she suddenly lowered her voice: “So, should I tell you everything?” I did not know what she meant but nodded her on. The tape recorder was on the table and she knew I planned to write about our conversation. She started telling me about her trip to Florida when she was 18, single and bold. Arturo was in the other room and might have come back at any moment. I might be stuck with the current situation, María Delia seemed to be saying, but there was a time when it could have been otherwise. Migrating was Arturo’s way out of an environment he

perceived to be shrinking: his wife and his children do not know what he is talking about.

Several years into Arturo's decision the family has changed. When he left his son was 23 and his daughter 18. His son joined him two years after Arturo settled in New York City. Arturo got him a job at the supermarket where he worked in the beginning, but the night before starting his son had an accident. It was already dark and on his way home he walked by a car wash and there was grease on the sidewalk; he fell and broke his finger. The son was going to work at the deli, but now had a cast on his hand. Arturo took about thirty pictures of the car wash sidewalk and his son's shoe, both still dirty with grease, and found a lawyer to sue the car wash. The son asked for a leave from the company he was working for in Guayaquil and stayed about 6 months as the case went on. In the end he was awarded \$3000. He lost his job in Guayaquil (his company would not wait so long) and when he tried to renew his visa it was denied (he had overstayed his visa and the consulate officials in Guayaquil would not consider the accident an acceptable reason, even though he had the documents from the case).

"So you know with all that my son was disappointed." The son is a voluntary firefighter in Ecuador and tried to join the fire department here, but without immigration status he could not. Back home he has his radio and his Motorola (he built the equipment himself, his father says) and when there is an emergency he heads immediately out. Arturo even has a newspaper from Guayaquil that the son sent him with a picture of him on the front page (after getting an injured woman out of her car). "It's not that he hasn't done good things," says Arturo, "it's just that life hasn't been on our side [para nuestro lado]."

His return to Guayaquil, however, hints at the distance between father and son. After referring to his own restless childhood, Arturo says that "my son didn't take

after me [mi hijo no salió así como yo].” And he adds: “I wish he had. My son is more laid back [tranquilo]; he’s more quiet [calmado]. I tell him: You’ve got to get ahead [salir adelante], take the initiative.” Generally critical of her husband, María Delia shares his view of their son. At the moment he is unemployed in Ecuador, and his mother would like him to come, but she does not think he wants to come. “The thing with my children—my daughter not so much—is that they’ve had a very different life—because we’ve given it to them. My daughter, for instance: she left her house, her car, her comfort [sus comodidades], having someone who served her [tener quien le sirva]; she left all that to follow us. Maybe if we’d been below middle class [si hubiéramos sido personas de clase media para abajo] they’d say, it doesn’t matter, I’ll go and struggle [me voy a luchar]. But their world is already made in Ecuador [su mundo está hecho en el Ecuador]. I tell him, son, you have to leave [tienes que salir]. He’s very reluctant.”

Arturo distinguishes between his two children as well: “My daughter is worse than me,” he says proudly. She came last year when it seemed that her father would need surgery and ended up overstaying her tourist visa as well. She works now at the KiFu, the same supermarket where Arturo worked in the beginning (and the same one where he got his son the deli job). She works under an aunt’s name; one day I ran into her in the store and called her by her real name—she was petrified. Arturo and his wife appreciate that their daughter joined them in New York City, but do not like it that she dropped out of school. “She had only one semester left,” Arturo repeats. Arturo and his wife have mixed expectations for their children. They want them to keep on with their previous life—and they want them to give that up and adjust to the new circumstances. Their son upsets them because he does not seem willing to go out on the road and look for something new; their daughter upsets them because she left

school to join them in New York City. As Arturo's wife puts it, "everything was very unstable [hubo mucha inestabilidad]" after Arturo left.

What is next? Never is Arturo's loneliness more apparent than when discussing the future. He has dragged the whole family into his world of fantasy—now everything is at stake. Is there any way to go back? They still have the three houses in Guayaquil, and they still pay the maid's salary. "Our goal is to return," María Delia says, but she knows it will not be easy. Arturo is less clear.

V. Yo quiero de nuevo renacer [I want to rise again]

Arturo left Guayaquil with the idea of staying in New York City for one or two years. Eight years later, his plan has not entirely changed—going back is still an open possibility, sometimes an imminent one—but planning does not mean the same thing. "My wife and I are people who think ahead. We plan: this money will go here, that money will go there. But then all of the sudden there's an accident or some other thing," repeats Arturo, "and so much for the plan." He regrets the gap between plans and reality: nothing works out as you plan [todo te sale cambiado]. Back in Guayaquil, he reacted to the collapse of his lifetime plans by coming up with an alternative: one or two years working in the United States. As the years go by and this original plan gets blurry, planning itself becomes less real. By overstaying his initial timeframe, Arturo has entered uncharted waters; he has lost control of the calendar. He still goes back to the old plan or makes other plans, but the new plans have no weight; there is no timetable attached.

You make plans but things don't work out the way you plan. I thought: if things go well in Ecuador I would return soon. But you watch the news—boys graduating from college, there's one who's been looking for a job for two years, and he's applied

everywhere. How is it possible that you have to apply through an employment agency? I don't get paid by the company but the agency; I have no right to vacation days or insurance or anything. That's not the way it should be. Look how many people have left for Spain and Italy. And it's not only people from below the middle [de la categoría de la mitad hacia abajo—media abajo] that have left. It's also people—look at my buddy [compadre] living in Florida: he's an architect and works as a security guard in a store there in Florida. I tell you honestly I don't know. My idea was to return in a short time. But you see one thing and then another. . . . Unfortunately sometimes you think one way and . . . People say that there's work now—sure there's work for the people who've been there all along and never had problems. Young people now graduate from school and can't find jobs. People come here, Nicolás, people come here. You can see the news—we buy our newspaper. They've built lots of new houses: no one wants to buy them. There's no money, no one wants to invest. People don't know what's going to happen with this government; now it's involved with the FARC and so many other things. People are afraid it's going to be like Chávez in Venezuela, that's why people are afraid. People take their money out of the country—better to have your money somewhere else than in your own country. So the risks are big. You're going to lose the money you've earned your whole life: what for? So much running only to fall at the final hurdle [tanto nadar para ahogarse en la orilla].

Arturo did intend to return to Ecuador, and perhaps he still does; but it is not easy. Based on cases he knows and the Guayaquil newspapers and TV, he suggests prospects in Ecuador are grim. It is difficult for young people to get even bad temporary jobs, he says, implicitly referring to his son, who at this time was unemployed; and it is particularly difficult if you have had “problems” and left,

implying it would be difficult for him to get back on the labor market. And this is the case regardless of your social position, as the case of his architect buddy, now in Florida, shows. The chances of getting a good job back in Ecuador are not good, but this is not what he is looking at the most. Talking about Ecuador like some sort of uneasy investor, Arturo concentrates on the unstable political situation and the bad business climate (the current government keeps flirting with Venezuela’s Chávez-style populism, he says, thus scaring potential investors and pushing them to take their money out of the country).¹²⁴

These business-like comments on the Ecuadorian economy, however, sound too much influenced by newspaper articles and TV shows; it does not look like he has considered them much. They may help justify why he has not returned as planned, but it is hard to think they are the main reason. While Arturo does think of investing in Ecuador, the decision about return cannot be so much about the business climate in Ecuador. Along with his vague remarks on the situation back home are more precise references to his own situation in New York City: “And then it’s what happened to me—that’s why I’ve put up with it [por eso es que me he aguantado]. Otherwise I’d still be working at the airport—if I hadn’t run into my ‘great friend’ [mi gran amigo entre comillas]; I’d be doing well.” The loss of the airport job stands for all the problems he has had in New York City. He does not say that “otherwise I would have returned”; he says he would have kept working at the airport. But the airport job

¹²⁴ Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa (2007-present) has been relatively close to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (1999-present). The city of Guayaquil (Guayas Province) has been less favorable to President Correa than the rest of the country:

Rafael Correa (Alianza PAIS)’s Presidential Results (%)		
Year - Election	Guayas Province	Total Ecuador
2006 Presidential Election - 1st round	16.6	22.9
2006 Presidential Election - Runoff	41.7	56.7
2009 Presidential Election - 1st round	44.6	52.0

Source: <http://www.cne.gob.ec>

stands for hard work and good money. And money is an essential precondition for his investor-like return.

Arturo's reasoning indicates that his decision to return hinges on his own success in New York City, not the Ecuadorian economy. It is not that the Ecuadorian economy has to be good; it is more that he has to be better off than the Ecuadorian economy. It is a race between the two: what matters is the gap. Arturo mentions the dollarization of his country in 2000: "And on top of everything else our currency shot up to the dollar. What can you do with this exchange rate? It doesn't work for us [No nos rinde]." Without local currency there is no exchange rate, and without an exchange rate Arturo lacks one of the earlier migrants' economic and symbolic tools to make distance work: back in the day, the \$100 Arturo's aunt would send home would last for weeks or months. The exchange rate magic is gone. Dollarization has brought the worlds closer: going back is more difficult now.

Some days are bad, some days are better; sometimes he has slept a bit more. Arturo's view of Guayaquil is directed by his view of New York City. Sometimes he complains about the situation back home, his voice a somber whisper. Yet it does not last long: "But well," he recovers, "the point is to fight on and not let yourself fall down; if I were one of those people whose spirit is dead—forget about it: I'd be long gone. I was up there and suddenly fell down. I want to rise again [Yo quiero de nuevo renacer]." And he jumps into his plans: "I tell you, honestly: I, myself, Arturo Gómez, still have more to do. I know I can do more. In case something happens here or if I get some good money from the compensation case, I'll go back. And I'm going to start something up in Ecuador, and it's going to be something good." The idea of returning gets back on the table, triumphantly; and it soon goes away. The recording shows I was confused:

-I like doing business [A mí me gusta el negocio]. I know I'll start something up [algo he de poner]. I gather more money and . . .

-You mean in Guayaquil.

-Here.

-Here? You're not thinking of going back?

-Yes.

-So you're thinking of the business here or in Guayaquil?

-Here. And another one in Guayaquil.

-Ah . . .

-The thing is that I can't return now because I don't have papers.

-So if you go you can't come back.

-I do want to come back here.

-You do want to return.

-I like it because you can do business. Your doors are open.

-You mean in Guayaquil.

-Here.

-Here?

-And from here I can send merchandise there. I already know good places to buy.

“Here” and “there” play tricks: Which is which? Which one does he have in mind? It may be neither one; like the merchant he imagines moving merchandise from one place to the other, Arturo wants to be in between. What does he want? “If you’ve come here it’s for something [El que ha venido aquí es por algo],” he says often, revealing as much as he hides; or “My goal is to get everything I want [Mi meta es cumplir todo lo que yo quiero],” similarly veiling what he does want.

Look, anyone who's emigrated from his country gets nostalgic every now and then. You know, whatever it may be in our countries, there's more family warmth than in this country. Here it's working, working, working, working. In our countries you finish working and go to your sister's or your friend's; you have time to do other things. Not here. You have to work your eight hours and you've got to see what schedule they give you. And if the money isn't enough you have to get more than one job; so you're here, hop to another place, then another one, finally you get home: when do you have time for your family? You're lucky if you're free Saturday and Sunday. Often they'll have you work on the weekend and rest one or two weekdays. I'm here resting while everyone else is working: what do I do? And in this country you know sometimes it's hard. No one's going to help you; not even your family will help you. Not in our countries: some family member goes to your house, you invite them to stay and eat with you.

The contrast between family back home and work in the United States is often mentioned by immigrants. Arturo's phrasing, however, is ambiguous: you get nostalgic "every now and then." About to hand over his cleaning weekend job to his friend, he acknowledges his right to rest: "It's not that I can work and work and work until busting my lungs [dejar mis pulmones]"—but he immediately adds: "I would do it—if I were alone; if my wife and my daughter were not here. By myself I could do it; I don't have to worry about seeing them." Leaving the weekend job will give him more time to be with his family—but is that what he really wants? Arturo still needs the distance. He wants to come back to Ecuador, yes—but under very specific conditions. Nostalgia, in fact, like some sort of luxury good, only makes an appearance when he is smelling success. The idea of return only feeds on good news.

VI. Business Plans

Arturo rejects the idea of going back to his previous work in the foreign trade sector:

“It’s been too long, things over there have changed too much; it’s hard to go around knocking on doors.” He wants something different: “I tell my wife it’d be better to start up our own business, and I’ve got several plans in mind; things I’ve seen here that maybe you see in Ecuador, but not like here.” Starting up his “own business”: why does he not think of his old company as his “own business”? It may be that he has forgotten how it feels to be your own boss. It may be that back in Guayaquil he never felt his own boss—so entrenched was he in family and social circles. It may be that after working in New York City autonomy has come to mean something more radical: not relying on anyone other than himself.

What new ideas does he have in mind? What has he seen in New York City?

“In Ecuador there are big corporations that need cleaning services—to set up a cleaning company is good. I know that line of work; it was my first job when I arrived. I’ve been there, I’ve seen and learned.” Starting up his own cleaning company in Guayaquil is one of his ideas. Another one involves food: “I can set up a cart [un *restorant rodante*] to sell chuzos—beef, pork, and chicken chuzos, with their different sauces and everything. There’s this place not far from where I live that would be good. There’s this big shopping mall, and actually more shopping centers that opened after I left. You can also make sausages, and have peppers, red and green, and onions to put on the meat. Colombians make it here but the meat is not tender. You see the food and the money right away.”

Can the long hours mopping provide the seed for this kind of business project?

“In Guayaquil you can do it—banks, corporations, shipping companies. With some leverage [*palanca*] you can do it—I know many people.” Years after turning his back on family and social connections, Arturo cannot imagine returning successfully to the

Guayaquil business arena without their help. Is he willing to do it? Is that not why he does not want to go back to his old job? The *chuzos* idea, on the other hand, suggests the opposite: while the formal and informal rules dictating street vending in New York City would require complex paperwork and tactful negotiation, in Guayaquil you just go and do it—no connections are necessary. The *chuzos* project would let him return without having to knock on anyone's door. And yet can he really picture himself selling food on the street back in Guayaquil—and not far from his own house?

Both projects show that Arturo has changed: cleaning and food vending are industries he would not have considered before. For the cleaning project, however, he has changed too much; and for the *chuzos* project he has not changed enough. Needless to say, both look entirely unreal. Planning, overall, has become entirely unreal. By leaving Guayaquil Arturo put aside his social position; it was meant to be temporary, but time keeps going by. He has changed and he has not. It has become difficult to locate himself—he is losing sight of his place.

Tentative as they may be, Arturo's business plans still depend on two further conditions: one is money, the other one papers (some kind of regularization of his immigration status). Going back and investing requires capital. I asked Arturo if he was saving money: very little. His case at the Workers' Compensation Board has become his only hope to set aside an amount significant enough to make plans for the future. The second condition for return that he mentions is legalization. Why does he care about regularizing his immigration status in the United States if he plans to return to Ecuador?

"I hope the accident thing works out. The lawyer called me, I want to see how much they'll give me." Arturo invokes the workers' compensation case often: it is the light down the road. The last time I went with him to the WCB the lawyer said she had talked to the employer's insurance company regarding a settlement. The lawyer said

she had asked the insurance company for a \$45K settlement, and the company counteroffered \$37K. “It’s not a bad offer,” she said. On the way back Arturo asked me what I thought of the offer. I asked him if he would need more physical therapy—upon accepting the money he will lose all medical benefits. He said he is not doing well: numbness in his hands and fingers—dropping the paper because his hands do not respond and getting too tired at work. I said it also depended on whether he was thinking of going back to Ecuador—the WCB medical insurance does not cover workers outside the United States.¹²⁵ I do not think I helped him much. He has been waiting for this offer for a long time; now it is finally here and he does not know what to do.

The other precondition Arturo mentions when discussing return is some kind of legalization opportunity. Only by regularizing his immigration status before leaving for Ecuador could he come back to the United States in case he changes his mind. “You don’t know what can happen later on. It’s this uncertainty we feel; we don’t know whether we get back and tomorrow something happens in Ecuador and then we’ll regret it—and we have no way back.” He follows the news and looks forward to the upcoming elections. “Something good for people who’ve arrived up to a certain date, like there was last time; I came to this country with my passport, not crossing borders or anything like that, and the same for my wife and daughter; and I’ve saved all the receipts from remittances I’ve sent to my family in Ecuador, all the taxes I’ve

¹²⁵ The history of workers’ compensation in the United States is told by Witt (2004). On the obscurities of workers’ compensation for undocumented workers: O’Donovan 2006. Immigrants have dealt with workers’ compensation for a long time. I quote from Pietro de Donato’s ([1939] 2004) *Christ in Concrete*, the great novel of Italian immigration in NYC: “The great building of the Compensation Bureau was a thick-walled forbidding ten-storied structure. It had the discouraging semblance and overwhelming morgue aspect of Institution . . . From the third story of the building projected a flagpole and from it hung a huge blue flag. On it in soiled white letters was the State emblem and the words: ‘Workmen’s State Compensation Bureau’” (122-3). And then: “People, poor people. And their faces pulled at Paul’s heart. Their eyes and lips said, we are the battered poor, poor stupid poor, we are the maimed and the crippled and bandaged and blind workers who can not speak and are led and pushed through these corridors like subway corridors and into chambers where we understand nothing” (123).

filed, everything.”¹²⁶ As the 2008 presidential elections approached and the Hispanic vote became critical, the two presidential candidates promised immigration reform all over the Spanish-language media.¹²⁷ “It’d be wonderful if something came up [Si sale algo bueno sería algo extraordinario]; let’s hope [ojalá] maybe in November.”

Occasionally Arturo lets his guard down: “The other day I told my wife that sometimes I think about staying here.” María Delia rushed to cut him off: “We just have to see what’s better for us.” Like their whole emigration experience, the idea of return brings to the fore differences between Arturo and his wife. Never happy with having left, she makes her wish clear: “Our goal is to return,” she says. “It’s not like we said, OK, we have nothing, let’s start a new life from scratch. We left things in our country—it’s not that we haven’t left anything behind.” After more than four years in New York City, however, even María Delia is having second thoughts: “But really I don’t know. Nowadays I’m also scared of going back to my country. I’m scared [Me da miedo]. Things over there are not like before. Your connections begin to close off [Sus conexiones ya se van cerrando]. And if we don’t have the money to go back and start something up . . . It’s going to be difficult. Going back to not having a job, going back to the same. You can take some money with you, but money runs out.”

I ask María Delia how she imagines the future and she talks about her children: “I want to see that my children have studied, I want them to have skills [que se hayan preparado]. I want us to be a family again, even if they follow their own path [a pesar de que ellos hagan sus vidas]. Now my son is there and I’m here, and my heart is there, and I think about the things I’ve left behind. If you’re not there things get lost

¹²⁶ Arturo has in mind the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Under Title II, Section 201, IRCA mandated the Attorney General to adjust the status of an alien to that of an alien lawfully admitted for temporary residence if the alien could establish that he entered the United States before January 1, 1982, and that he has resided continuously in the United States in an unlawful status since such date. That is why he saves the receipts.

¹²⁷ Examples include interviews with John McCain (Hastings 2008) and Barack Obama (Marrero 2008) in NYC’s *El Diario/La Prensa*.

[las cosas se pierden]. I want my daughter who's here to speak perfect English, so I can go back to Ecuador, have her study at the university, and hopefully she'll find a job. Arturo thinks along the same lines: "My goal is that my daughter goes back and finishes college—although she's studying English here as well." She could stay here if there was an opportunity to regularize her immigration status—attending college in the United States without documents is not impossible but difficult. "She wants to go back," says Arturo, "but also she wants to keep working, making some money; then when I have my money I can go back, she says; or from here I can do distance education in Ecuador."

Here or there? Neither Arturo nor María Delia seems to know what they want for their children, or where they want them to be. "My children chose to study the same as I did [cogieron la misma carrera mía]: import and export and Customs," says Arturo. "They were going to take over my office [hacerse cargo de la oficina]. That was my plan—I'd keep advising and helping them but they'd take over. But all that went nowhere [Pero todo quedó en la nada]." The children had embarked on their father's plan, the road ahead was clear and safe. Now that the plan has vanished no one knows what is next.

It is still too early and uncertain. Future plans depend on the situation in Ecuador, but more so on how things go in the United States. When eight years ago he left Guayaquil the decision was more about Guayaquil than New York City; emigration rather than immigration; leaving one place rather than going to another. Now the choice depends on how he does in New York City—but only because imagining return hinges so much on the money he has been able to make. Now and then decisions are ultimately about Guayaquil. In New York City he can make no choices: there is no frame of reference. The person deciding to return is not the same one who left eight years ago. Arturo has seen too much: it is difficult to go back to the

nest. What will happen? He left Guayaquil without thinking, and without thinking he might return. He might also send back his family and stay working in New York City: invisible, day by day.

VII. Hay gente que no sabe de dónde viene uno

[Some people don't know where you come from]

About one year after meeting Arturo he called me to ask if I could be at his house on Saturday at 2 pm. He did not say why. When I arrived the place was upside down: they were finally moving to an apartment on their own. I helped them pack as we waited for their friend to come with his van. I knew who this friend was and looked forward to meeting him: Miguel Tronco, the real one—the one who has lent Arturo his name. It was about to start raining and Miguel did not show up. Arturo was getting nervous. His wife and daughter complained about his obsession with the packaging tape.

The new place was about 20 minutes away, not far from where I lived. An Ecuadorian guy owned the house and was renting out the basement: one bedroom, living room, sit-in kitchen. No need for the daughter to sleep in the same room with her parents, and no roommates around. And it was only \$100 more than their rent now. Miguel showed up with the van around 6 and brought along three more people to help—everyone from Guayaquil. When everything had been moved, I saw Arturo give some money to Miguel. We were standing on the sidewalk outside the new house. Miguel took the money without looking at it, put it in his pocket, and walked away. Arturo turned to me and took his hand to his pocket—I stopped him just in time. He was surprised. I was still unfamiliar with immigrant life.

Right before the last trip to the new house I went upstairs with Arturo to get the last few things left. Arturo went to the kitchen and rummaged through the fridge

and cupboards grabbing every single leftover that could be grabbed. At first sight I thought it was resentment towards his housemates; he did not want to leave anything for them. Then I thought it was simply not discarding anything that could be used. This was the same man who back home handed out food and toys, I thought. I left him in the kitchen and for the first time entered their room. It looked small and ugly the way rooms look when you move the furniture out; there were marks on the floor and the walls. This was the room where the three of them had lived for the past years; it had seen them ponder their future and enclosed their memories of the past; small as it was, it had accommodated the memory of the three houses they still own back home.

Who is Arturo Gómez? The contrast between his life in Ecuador and here is puzzling. Why has he moved from three houses to one small room? How has he changed from running his own foreign-trade agency to working in cleaning? How has he adjusted to the new conditions? But “adjustment” is not the right word. Arturo conceived of migration as temporary: one or two years working in the United States. This is why he was willing to undergo the changes: it would not last long. How could he have adjusted to conditions he thought of as temporary? Arturo has changed to survive immigrant conditions. He has learned to live and work without documents, and his body has learned the hard way the rigor and hazards of immigrant work. He can take it all now; it is routine. And yet Arturo keeps signaling that he is not just anybody; he draws lines to distinguish himself from other immigrants—despite New York City’s blindness not everyone is the same. By keeping these distinctions alive, Arturo preserves the social space he left behind—somewhere to go back.

“My hands are not tied,” Arturo said to himself before leaving Guayaquil. The New York City jungle has both forced and allowed him to go back to his own hands: to depend on no one other than himself. Moving across the big city, his MetroCard as his only passport, anonymous and poker-faced, invisible, Arturo may have felt free.

What has been the cost? For one thing, he has dragged his family along. Discussing his weekend job, he says he would keep it, were it not for his wife and daughter; he has to spend time with them too. By himself he could live like a dog; his family deserves something else. Also, so far he has been able to rely on his hands—but immigrant work has taken a toll on his body. And his hands are certainly his—but the name or social security number he needs to work is not. Physically exhausting and legally impossible, his immigrant jobs are dead ends. In Guayaquil he has lost his place; in New York City he has never had a place—and he is losing it anyway. The future is uncertain. Arturo makes plans in the air—time keeps dashing on.

“Some people don’t know where you come from,” Arturo told me once, “they don’t know who you are.” I hear the complaint about indifference, and also the relief—anonymity makes life easier as well. I also hear him calling on me. This is what my research is about, the question I have to answer myself. I pursued his story: some degree of order and consistency, some more or less meaningful chain of events. Arturo thought of the interviews as still another job. The notes I took after the interviews revolve on how tired he was: *I met him at 1 pm and stayed with him until 3 pm—he had not slept since the day before. He yawned and said sorry all the time. It’s strange to talk to someone who’s very tired; it’s like someone who’s drunk, and you don’t notice he’s drunk until you suddenly realize.* Arturo often lost track of what he was talking about, his tone getting softer, his words dragging on with no aim. My questions tried to streamline his wandering voice. And yet Arturo’s ramblings were an important part of the plot.

The emerging story may have no plot, or the plot may be too open and incomplete. Arturo “rambled” because of sleep deprivation, but also because his perception of narrative order was different from mine. The chronology was elusive; Arturo often jumped back and forth. How does immigrant memory work? I might

have expected Arturo to be nostalgic, but nostalgia requires calm. Arturo's memory is too much in jeopardy—the past is slipping away. He does not recollect the past; he snatches it from the present—that is why his narrative jumps. But the present—the ground where he is standing—does not really exist: he never planned to be here this long. The old life seems to be over, but nothing has come to take its place. By trying to reconstruct the timeline I brought temporality back in; my questions targeted the contrast between the past and the present. Somehow lost between the two, Arturo had no answers. He rambled around my questions—my questions were not the questions he had in mind.

Arturo adds some sort of moral perspective: there ought to be something else. His voice fades away. After three or four seconds of silence, he looks up and concludes by evoking his hard-learned lessons, not unlike the worn-out warrior, bitter but not unhappy, almost at peace: “But this is life, Nicolás. You think you can trust the people surrounding you—and then when you're not doing well [el día que dejes de tener] people look somewhere else. That's why I say: friends should be friends through thick and thin. You only see your true friends when you're in trouble. People turn their back on you: Who's Arturo? Who's Nicolás? And then you have money and they're around you like tracker dogs. I've always acted in good faith—never in bad faith. I've always tried to help. And bad things people have done to me.”

Before I left Queens Arturo invited me over for lunch. I knew it was going to be good. His family was there and also the neighbor who told them about the new place. The table was set nicely in the kitchen, more formally than I had ever seen in Queens, with appetizer and main plates, and pleasant figure ice skating softly on TV. The new house made things easier. We had Ecuadorian ceviche, costeño style—with canguil to soak up the juice—and then lasagna and coffee and dessert. Arturo was in a good mood. He told me that his brother-in-law had suggested they move upstate with

him, but Arturo said no. And then he mentioned he had argued with his wife because she has the idea that he wants to stay in the United States. Then he told me about some complications at work: everyone but him, including Carlos, got a letter prompting them to “correct” their social security numbers. No one knows what will happen.

PART TWO:
JODIDO PERO EN NUEVA YORK
[SCREWED—BUT IN NEW YORK CITY]

CHAPTER FIVE:
YO VINE A PAGAR LA SOBERBIA
[I CAME TO PAY FOR MY PRIDE]

I. Last Whisky on the Rocks

Sunnyside, Queens. A three-story walk-up building, third floor apartment in the rear. Late November, outside it is cold. The apartment is warm and dark; I come in and we sit in the kitchen, two windows facing the silent courtyard. A note on the fridge demands that the kitchen be kept clean. He is around 50, average height and complexion, dark hair and an old-fashioned, thin moustache. He is from Cuenca, third largest city in Ecuador, and came to New York City in 1990. We have talked casually and had lunch together two times; this is the first time I ask him about his arrival in the United States. He jokes and smiles shyly, speaks slowly and calmly. It is Wednesday morning; he is in no rush.

You don't know. You learn after you've done it, not before. And you hear what people say. Some people, you tell them the truth, and they don't believe you; then you lie to them, and they do. There are people who come here and only show pictures taken at nice places [lugares bonitos]; they never say what they do. There are people who live shut in one room [metida en un cuarto], work seven days a week, 12 or 15 hours a day; they don't eat well or dress well [ni comen bien ni se visten bien]. They send all the money back, so it looks like they're making lots—but no one knows at what cost. There are many people who finish their mission here, go back, and in a couple of months they die, their lungs being bad because they've killed themselves working too much [mal del pulmón porque se mató trabajando mucho].

They said that the only problem was having money for the ticket, because it cost \$5000 or \$6000 or \$7000. Not anyone can have that money. So I thought, if that's the problem, I can pay for the ticket. But when I arrived here I couldn't get a job. I'd go to play volleyball in Flushing Park; I used to play in Ecuador—ecuavolley, that's what it's called—so I could be the umpire, or play if someone was missing. Two dollars, three, sometimes five, I collected some money. I spent the whole day there. I ran into many people there, people from my old job, people who knew me from the book sales [de la venta de libros]. Saturdays, Sundays, I went to the park, people came from Connecticut, Long Island, back then everyone drank beer at the park. They'd pay for the food, and sometimes passed the hat around, this is for the newcomer: \$20. They put it in my pocket, sometimes \$250, \$300; they told me, Buddy [Flaco], don't worry, here you've got something for the rent; for food you can come over to the house.

He arrived in October, the weather still nice. The park in Flushing was good for seeing people. Acquaintances from Ecuador remembered him well—and that was part of the problem: “I hoped they would take me to work with them, but they knew me from the kind of job I had before [por la condición que yo trabajaba antes]. In Ecuador I went around all decked out in a suit and nicely groomed [andaba de traje y bien limpio]. They wouldn't take me to the jobs they did here. They asked me: How come you've left the books, come here abandoning everything—and now who's going to go there spreading culture around? That didn't help me much.”

I found myself without one cent in my pocket [pantalón y persona sin un centavo en el bolsillo]. I went around with one dollar. If someone gave me [me regalaba] one dollar in the beginning—one dollar was the train token; and I could walk to save that money. And sometimes I had to spend the whole day with one dollar in the park. Not even drinking water, not buying anything, so I could come back home, with one dollar. You

go out in the morning, and if there isn't someone who gives you [que le regale] a sandwich, something to eat, you come back home this way [hay que volver así a la casa]; and you know you don't have anything at home.

His name may have been Julio Colarejo. I met him at an immigrant organization in Queens, two blocks from his apartment. I remember the first time I saw him. I was in the small reception area, looking at some flyers. He came in and said hi to the receptionist, also Ecuadorian, and soon she asked him how long ago he had obtained his citizenship; some magazine was writing an article and wanted to talk to recent citizens. The organizer came out from inside and told us to get ready; it is the first time Julio shows up in my notes: *A van was waiting outside and we left for the Department of Education public audience in Jamaica. I sat next to Julio, from Ecuador, and talked to him for a while. He is divorced and has children, but not in New York City. When I said I was from Argentina he told me he had volunteered to fight in the Malvinas.*

Julio and I were part of the so-called Education Committee. The meetings were at 5 pm, once every two weeks; the committee focused on some of the problems facing immigrants in the public school system. Julio was one of the few men on the committee, and I was the only one without children. My notes remind me that he did not pass unnoticed: *Today we sat in the backyard, maybe five or six people, talking and drinking soda as we waited for the organizer. Julio led the conversation: And why did you leave your beautiful country, he smiled to Graciela, who's also from Ecuador, and also from Cuenca. She said that her husband won the lottery visa. Many people came that way, explained Julio, and that's not so difficult, you can go back whenever you want; for me it was different: it took me twelve years to see my daughter again.*

We would walk out of the meetings together and chat on the curbside, first about the meeting and then something else, mostly Julio telling me stories. *Today he told me about the citizenship test—I read in my notes. The officer asked him who the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was, one of the questions on the list. But this was soon after Chief Justice Rehnquist had died, so he wasn't sure what to answer. He had watched on TV that John Roberts had been nominated, though not yet confirmed. He paused for a second and said John Roberts. The officer told him Roberts had just been confirmed, the answer being correct.* Julio liked telling this story, reconstructing the dialogues in detail, creating suspense. He was in no hurry, apparently no one was waiting for him.

We have been talking for a while. Julio gets up to make tea and puts water to boil in a frying pan. Does he not have a kettle? The pan is manlier, I guess. The whole apartment looks masculine, melancholic, basic. When I told him that I wanted him to tell me about his immigrant story, he did not look surprised. “No problem,” he said, “I can tell you.” And then he warned me: “But there’s one condition. We’ll have to pretend I jumped over here [di un salto], and here I am.” I was surprised but said, sure, of course. This morning I am asking him why he has come.

The first thing is that I needed capital for my business; much money was necessary to buy the merchandise from the importers. As I've told you, I sold encyclopedias, and we had to bring them from Spain. Customers ordered the product, so we needed capital to pay for the merchandise, but then also we needed capital to give credit to people; it was like we needed two capital pools. The business was working well, there were profits. The situation in Ecuador was much better than now. It was still the time of the national currency, the sucre; back then there was cash [circulante]. People used books much more, there were no computers. Everyone who was studying needed a textbook, an encyclopedia; and the same went for professionals: everyone needed

his technical book, his dictionary. As the business grew I needed more capital, because we sold on credit. That's why we started thinking about coming here; it was said [se decía] that here you could work better and make some money fast.

By the time he decided to travel Julio had run his own office for almost 10 years. He had salesmen and collectors working for him, selling books in five provinces, mostly on installments. The books were all imported from Spain; there was an importer in Quito, and they were the sub-distributors. He had started working for another distributor, learned the business, and soon become independent. His wife had worked with him all along. His memories convey prosperity and determination. The job suited him well; he read psychology of sales and went through the merchandise carefully, finding the right approach for each customer.

I had wanted to work in sales for a while, but never had the chance. At one point someone told me about this place where they were looking for salesmen, I went for an interview and they gave me an opportunity. Eight days to study the catalogs, and then I began. And it turned out I was good at it. In five months I was the best salesman, leaving the old salesmen behind. And at the sixth month I became independent. My wife worked at this company as well, as secretary and accountant; she was the one keeping the accounts. We had seen how the business functioned, and we said, why should we work for someone else if we can work on our own? She knew the office stuff and I knew the job outside [lo de afuera].

Julio and his wife considered getting a loan from a bank to finance the business expansion, but without anything to put up as collateral it was not an option. The only alternative was the loan shark [chulquero], and the interest rates were too high. Then they started thinking about coming to the United States. Maybe for two or three years,

the plan was to save some money and then go back and invest in their business. And that was not it: “I also had a dream—I had a daughter, and I wanted to build a house with balconies [una casita con balcones] like she wanted.” From the beginning the trip did not go according to plan.

The two of us were scheduled [hubo programado] to travel on the same date, but some deals [los negocios] didn't work out in time, so she left and I had to stay behind. Supposedly it'd be only for fifteen days or a month, and then I'd catch up with her here. But things didn't go well. I sold a car and the buyer was supposed to give me the money on the next day; he gave me a deposit [entrada] but didn't show up the next day. He showed up eight months later, saying he had gone to Quito and been caught at the airport and taken to jail, unable to communicate with anyone—he had an open lawsuit [pleito]. So I was left without the car and without the money, and this is the money I needed for the trip. I was denied the visa to come here, and also the visa for Mexico. I paid \$3800 for a visa for Mexico but that money was stolen from me—you know how it works, it's a chain, a mafia, the people at consulates are part of it.

How did he manage? “Then someone offered to lend me money and put me in touch with other people—and to make the story short let's say I jumped over and got here.” He had warned me: not everything could be discussed. How did he make it here? I could not ask. What was the original plan? Neither Julio nor his wife had applied for visas—either for the United States or Mexico—before she left; she somehow made it into Mexico and then crossed the border into the United States. Was he planning to travel with her? One year after his wife left Cuenca he was finally here. “Where are you staying?” the immigration officer at JFK asked. “At the Sheraton.” He looked for a cab but did not find one; he took a limo instead: \$100 from JFK to Queens. The driver offered him a drink. “Do you have whisky?” He sat in the back,

poured himself a whisky on the rocks from the minibar, and relaxed. It had been so complicated, there have been so many obstacles. He was finally in New York City—and the problems were about to begin.

His wife was waiting for him at her friend's apartment, not far from where he lives now. "When I finally caught up with her here it was too late," he smiles. "What should not have happened did [Pasó lo que no tenía que pasar]." I hesitate but ask: What happened? "Let's say that I didn't find her to be the same person—she was someone else." His voice is almost a whisper; I do not know what he is talking about. "Did she come by herself?" I try. "No. She came with someone, someone who was still a boy. And she has lived with him ever since." I do not say anything. "After I got here we separated and from then on I have never seen her nor do I talk to her. And I don't ask nor want to know more. For me she is dead [la que en vida fue] and may she rest in peace [que en paz descanse]. An agreement I have with my daughter is that she should never talk to me about her."

Someone he knew from Ecuador told him about an available room on 104th Street, Corona, Queens, and the two moved in together. "At least it was someone you already knew," I say. "That's precisely the difficult part," he shoots back. The roommate was not his friend—just an acquaintance who had been here longer and wanted to save money. The rent was about \$115 a month.

It was eight of us in an apartment, four small rooms, two people sleeping in each room; two beds, no room to stand in the middle. Of course when you have just arrived you don't have anything; now I wouldn't even have space for the plates and spoons. And you can imagine what it's like to share with people with different habits, different manners [otras costumbres, otros modales]. People with no manners [Gente sin costumbres]. He tried to be good, but was from the countryside, and well . . . It's hard when you have to share like that.

It was difficult, he says, because he was used to something different: “Where I lived in Cuenca was nice: a beautiful house, good living room, even a guest room.” The change was abrupt. “My maid [empleada]’s bedroom was luxurious [una cosa de lujo] compared to where I live up to this day; she lived like a queen: big room, private bathroom, everything.” His voice rises slightly as he looks around. “And look at how one lives here. We don’t live like human beings, we live like animals. Now I’ve gotten used to it; I’ve adjusted to the bad [adaptado a lo malo], there’s no choice [no queda otra]. If one starts thinking of what one was and what one had, there’s no way to stay here one more day [Porque si uno pensando en lo que fue y en lo que tuvo, aquí no es permanecer pero un día].”

Something went wrong and everything started falling apart. He failed to sell a car and ended up getting delayed for a year. His business already closed, he had no money, and the little money he had got lost in ill-fated attempts. When he finally met his wife in New York City, she had changed. Migration was to be an investment in their family business—soon there was no business and no family. With no money and no job, abandoned by his wife and far away from his daughter, Julio remembers his first times in New York City as awfully bad. Did he think of going back?

But how? With what? What for? It would have been the same anywhere I was. I had already left my house [no tenía casa]. What was I going to do with no money and the child? And no one’s going to go back being in debt. I had debt to pay off: How was I going to pay for that? How am I going to work if everything there was broken? My hopes had vanished [Todas las ilusiones se fueron en el aire]. Instead of making money, everything was gone [En vez de reunir dinero, se fue a la basura]. My home was gone. I couldn’t come back. No one told me to go back. Stay here. Hold on [Aguántate] until you get work. You’ll find a job, you’ll do better [vas a mejorar la

situación]. And it's never good to go back defeated. That's what people want to see when they hurt you—so if you can help give them the pleasure . . .

Julio has buried the memories of his wife—he has buried them alive. “They say that the tallest towers fall down—the point is to get them back up. Not that I have gotten that much up—but here I am.” Why was she the one to leave first? What did she tell him when he got here? What happened to her on the way? It is difficult to ask. The wound is still too open; migration and betrayal overlap.

I didn't know what was waiting for me. Things started out bad and got worse. I came—I should not have come, that's the thing. But once you've done it—then you can't go back. To start over again there is like starting over here; it's the same thing. These are the immigrants' stories. When people look at it from the outside they are all wise—but when it's their turn they don't know what to do. You have to live through it. And thank God you have the opportunity to prove how much you can stand [probar la capacidad de soporte]. And I'm only telling you what I want [Y todavía le cuento sólo lo que me conviene nomás].

II. Alguien tiene que aparecer [Someone has to turn up]

Julio did get out of the hole: he worked his way out. Two weeks before Christmas—two long months after his arrival—an acquaintance's friend brought Julio with him to the company where he worked. He was also Ecuadorian and one of the supervisors. The company specialized in metal structures: windows, doors, fire escapes. The workshop was in Brooklyn, but much of the work was done on location, setting up structures at buildings and construction sites, mostly below 34th Street in Manhattan.

The first day I spent sweeping, the second day I was already cutting iron. First they told me, look, this is the tape measure: here it's not meters any more, it's inches. This is the way it's divided. One foot—here it's feet—has 12 inches; an inch is divided into half, quarter, eighth, 16th, 32th, and even 64th in very precise measures. We're going to give you the measures and you're going to cut. Then I learned to weld, cut metals with a torch, paint. That was my first job, and it was hard. Iron is very heavy, and dangerous; the soldering iron, the torch, they all burn, I burned myself many times. I didn't have any practice, and anything you touch hurts. The job is ugly, and it was ugly because I never expected to do that, and because of all the problems I had in my head. I ended up very tired [Terminaba muy mal].

Much of the work was outside, so that first winter was hard. The company's Puerto Rican owner sometimes stopped by with the van and let the workers in to warm up, their hands half-frozen after hours working in the cold. What did Julio think of the job? "Better than nothing [Peor es nada dice el condenado]," he smiles. "At least I was working and making some money. I couldn't keep waiting, I had waited too long. And I got an idea of how the job was, and started to know the city." His account hints at some sort of recovery. Heavy physical work gradually numbed mental distress. A welder's mask covering his face and a cutting torch in his hand, Julio may have felt his damaged pride slowly coming back. What can be better to hide one's damaged manly pride than a welder's mask?

I worked there for about six or seven months. I learned to do everything: structures, windows, doors, to weld, to install. And yet I kept earning the same as the first day. So one day—I think it was the first week of June—I asked the boss if he could raise my wage a bit: because it was too low, and now I could do more things. And he said, let me see, we'll talk about it but later. I told him: now. He was in a rush, he had to travel

somewhere. I tell him: now—or I won't be here when you come back. He left, and I told my coworkers, you know what, I'll stay with you until lunch time, then I'm not working any more. I didn't have any other job offer, but I left.

About one month later he had another opportunity, this time at Urban Woods, a wood furniture factory right below the Brooklyn Bridge: “They made fine furniture, \$20,000 dining tables.” The owners were Jews and the factory was big, employing some 200 workers. “I didn't know any of that work, either, so in the beginning they just had me sand. The first days I had an allergy to the dust, then I got used to it.” This time few people spoke Spanish. “The problem was English; there were three Ecuadorians and then no other Hispanics—they were all Poles, Russians, and Jews themselves, from Israel, Syria and places in that area.” The company made furniture to order; at the time they were supplying a renovation project underway at the New York Hilton.

Then I was taken to a restaurant. Dishwasher. I've never got used to working inside, all day in one place. I got there at 10 am, walked in and my head started to hurt, and worked until 10 pm, always standing in the same place. I got out and felt better right away [ya estuve sano y bueno]. But during the time I was there the headache tormented me all day. For 12 hours they paid \$200 a week. I worked there only for one month, and then I said no. I'll starve to death happily [con gusto] but I'm not coming back.

“That's how it is,” he tells me. “You have no profession, you have no papers, you can't settle down in one place. You have to bounce around like a ball [andar como la pelota].” It is abuse at work that keeps immigrants on the move. “Either they treat you bad or they pay too little. The bosses [dueños de los trabajos] or the coworkers,

the more senior ones, they're very abusive, whatever country they are from." He was not willing to put up with it. His reconstruction of the events may be understating the difficulties, but his voice rises, confident again. It had not been long ago that he could be seen beaten and hungry, wandering the streets like a lost soul. Now he sounds assertive, almost New York City-style.

And then the situation changed. Someone found me and took me to teach me the construction trade. And I learned to do everything: to paint, to cut, to install ceramic tiles, to build bathrooms, that's when I started. It was an Ecuadorian man [señor] who'd been working at this company for a long time. He knew me in Ecuador—from what I did there—and told me that here he'd gone through the same difficulties as me, and he wanted to help me. He introduced me to his boss and asked him to give him the chance to teach me. They paid me \$40 a day while they taught me. Obviously he paid for my subway tokens and the coffees, and he gave me lunch. Someone has to turn up [Alguien tiene que aparecer]—because, I say, I wasn't a bad person in Ecuador, I helped many people, and I helped them from my heart. So this person [señor] turned up. He told me, don't worry, let me buy you a beer [mejor lo invite a tomar una cerveza]; you have to be happy [hay que estar happy], not get depressed—the fact is that he treated me well. At the fourth month they told me, you're already a master; go buy your own tools, it's time to earn like the rest. And I worked there for about twelve years.

"Someone has to turn up." When Julio first arrived in New York City he ran into people he knew from Ecuador; they were helpful and friendly, but they would not offer to take him to work with them. When three years later he ran into this other old acquaintance, something had changed. Did Julio look different now? Was it easier to ask for help? There are only two words Julio uses in English when telling me this: one

is token, the other is happy: he distances himself from the word, showing how foreign the idea was to him, how deep the gap this man helped him bridge was. Acquaintances in Ecuador, in New York City they became friends. Julio worked at this company from 1993 to 2001—not twelve years, as he says, but many years nonetheless.¹²⁸

They owned and managed apartment buildings for rent all over the city—maybe 300 buildings combining the two. You went to the apartments, and when people moved out you had to make everything look new before the new tenants came in. Kitchen, bathroom, walls, ceilings, anything that had to be fixed. You did everything by yourself; there was no assistant or anything. You had to take out everything and put in everything new. You were the carpenter, the one who lays the floors, the one who paints, the one who plasters, all of them, building bathrooms anew. I must have built more than 1000 bathrooms in all.

Julio liked this job. “You didn’t have to be in the same place. It was one week in one building, or sometimes one month, then one month in another building, always different areas, meeting different people. And I had time to do jobs on the side: Saturdays, Sundays, sometimes in the evenings. Even if the pay was low that was the advantage I had working in this company.” The extra jobs, many of them on Long

¹²⁸ At the first job Julio had in NYC—the metal structures—no papers were needed; he was paid in cash and never had to fill out any forms. The fine furniture company was much bigger and more formal. The manager asked him for his Social Security number, and when Julio said he did not have one, the manager himself explained to him where to get it: 42nd Street in Manhattan—that was where you could buy documents back then. In the end Julio did not need it because someone who was leaving gave him his. At the construction job Julio was asked for a Social Security number, and this time he decided to use his own name: “I got it on Roosevelt Avenue [la Roosevelt]. Back then they had typewriters—it was easy. The important thing was to bring the money; they already have the card, so they type the name and number. They have thousands of cards already printed out. Sales were on the street [Las ofertas eran al paso]: everyone was social, social, social, as you walked by. When people need green cards they ask you for all the information: date of birth, address, everything. I never did that and I was never asked to show one. For the social it’s only the name. They charged me \$50 or \$100 for it, I don’t remember. It takes half an hour at the most. Sometimes they give you the number, but in my case I made it up myself. I don’t know where I had gotten this number, and I reversed the order. And it worked out well for me: it never coincided with anyone else’s, that number was mine alone.”

Island, were well paid. Julio seems to remember these days as his best in New York City. He would go with his clients to Home Depot, discuss plans, make estimates for them, have them buy the materials. “I began using my imagination,” he insists. The entrepreneurial impulse he had left in Ecuador had found some space in New York City—his new technical pride meeting his old aptitude for sales.

By now he had paid off his travel debt; he kept sending money home for his daughter’s support, who had stayed with her maternal grandparents, and also sent money to help his own parents. “And at some point I sent money for myself as well”: some five years after his arrival in the United States, he sold a lot he had and combined the money with his savings here to buy himself a house in Cuenca. I ask him how he remembers all these years of work: “They were very austere [sacrificados] but at least they were worth something [pero sirvió de algo por lo menos]. I bought my house. Sometime it’ll help me, though I’m not using it now. Other people haven’t done anything.”

Julio has already mentioned the park in Flushing. In 1995 he met an Ecuadorian woman at the park, and they lived together until 1999. “As they say,” he smiles, “she was by herself, I was by myself . . . and now I have two children with her.” Jessica was born in 1998 and Jason in 2000. Before meeting this woman Julio had been alone. “I was disappointed [decepcionado] and didn’t want to know anything about anybody; I wanted to focus on making something to go back [hacer algo para volver].” Without papers, his presence in New York City was uncertain, so one way or another he was always anticipating his return. When he met this woman he felt better. “If something happens with Immigration [la Migra], we said, they can’t send us anywhere beyond Ecuador [del Ecuador no pasamos]. That’s the immigrant’s comfort [es una de las esperanzas para el inmigrante],” he jokes.

In 1999 the relationship ended; next year Jason was born. By the end of 2000—the final weeks of President Clinton’s term—Congress approved an omnibus spending bill that included the revival of an immigration law provision from 1994. Known as section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the provision permitted “certain aliens otherwise ineligible for adjustment to pay a penalty fee” and apply for family- or employment-based permanent residence. The law reinstated the provision for four months, replacing the previous cut-off date with April 30th, 2001.¹²⁹

Julio had no time to lose. Through one of his cousins in New York City he met a Dominican-born woman who was a United States citizen. He moved to Winchester, New Hampshire, where she lived, found a job in the area, and soon married her. Then he focused on building up evidence: lease, taxes, car registration, utility bills, pictures. He was thorough and did most of the work with no lawyer. The interview was in Manchester, New Hampshire. He told me about it more than once so I have it in my notes: *The official asked questions about their life in Winchester: Do you have friends? Do you have family? And then turned to Julio: Why have you moved here? Why have you decided to get married at this particular date? Julio said something vague but the officer insisted. Julio ran out of answers and finally said: because Clinton said justice for immigrants [porque Clinton dijo justicia para los inmigrantes]—alluding to the 254(i). The official asked him to stand up and follow him. Everything was good.*

Before long he received his green card in the mail. He moved back to New York City and gave \$5000 to his wife, as compensation “for the trouble she took [por las molestias].” According to Julio they “remained on good terms,” and as soon as possible he filed for divorce. After almost twelve years undocumented, he was now a

¹²⁹ Some details about the 245(i) can be found in the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website: http://www.uscis.gov/files/pressrelease/Section245iLIFEAct_032301.pdf. See also Pear (2000) in the *New York Times*.

legal permanent resident. Things had been difficult—he had wandered the streets alone and bounced from one job to another. And after all he had found direction. He learned a job and worked hard. He saved money to buy a house and was able to adjust his immigration status. In 2002, twelve years after leaving Ecuador, he traveled home for the first time.

III. Sentí que me sacudió la espalda [I felt a jerk in my back]

In 2005, three years after obtaining legal residency and three years after traveling to Ecuador, Julio Colarejo answered the question about Chief Justice Roberts correctly and became an American citizen. He was already living where he lives now, and sharing the apartment with his older brother, who had come to New York City in 2000. Julio's US-born children lived with their mother in Connecticut. After two or three years working on and off in construction, he was now employed at a dialysis clinic in Canarsie, Brooklyn. A cousin of his worked at the clinic and got him the job. Julio was some sort of nurse aide, moving supplies and patients around, and taking their temperature, blood pressure, and weight.

Like other areas in Brooklyn, Canarsie has seen fast demographic change as African-Americans and Caribbean immigrants moved in and the descendants of Italian and Jewish immigrants moved out. The changes have not been without friction, most noticeably at the neighborhood schools.¹³⁰ At health care facilities tensions arose as high turnover impaired the old kind of bond between patient and staff. Julio never met the clinic owner, an orthodox Jew, but saw his son and daughter-in-law, who ran the clinic and the nursing home adjunct to it. "They were despicable people [unos desgraciados]," remembers Julio, "the kind who don't greet you back."

¹³⁰ At the time of the 2000 Census Canarsie was 72% Black and 43% foreign-born. On racial tension in Canarsie: Rieder (1985).

There's a lot of injustice at these centers. No one watches [Nadie vela]. Only when they'll have an inspection do things get cleaned, organized—the patients treated sweetly, even the workers treated well, everyone smiling [todo es pura sonrisa]. But sometimes they beat the patients, they don't answer their calls when they need to use the bathroom. There was this old lady [viejita]—she was in her right mind, about to turn 100 years old but completely aware, spoke well, read. She called the nurses but they wouldn't come. She tried to get out of the chair by herself, and she fell down—she broke her leg and two ribs. What do they do? They make a report, call the ambulance, she leaves for the hospital. And from the hospital she never came back.

Julio remembers many of the patients. Some were difficult: “They are in pain, and that’s why they are aggressive.” Some were grateful: “They would drop an envelope in your apron pocket: \$20, maybe \$30.” Some even asked him about his family: “Some young women under dialysis treatment, some of them even teachers, they’d bring me something for my children, books or other presents.” But the patients he remembers the most are the ones mistreated by the staff. As health care workers, immigrants serve natives who are sick and often weak; the balance of power between immigrants and natives is reversed. Julio found opportunities that were new to him. Maybe for the first time in New York City he had a chance at conversation in English: chair-bound and pain-fearing, the patients were willing to talk to him—they were literally in his hands. His immigrant weakness—his broken English—met his patients’ physical weakness; conversation could be part of his job.

The job was different from anything he had done. He did not feel it was too demanding, and although the pay was low—\$12.50 an hour—there were chances to work overtime. He got along well with most people. “The work environment was good and considerate. Everyone called me Papi. Americans, Blacks, many people from the

Islands. Maybe it's because one's always worked with men." He felt at ease working with women and played with the idea of getting involved with one of them. It was tempting, he tells me, although the nurses cared too much about money: "These women are too demanding [exigentes]. One time I gave a ride to one of the nurses, and as soon as she gets in she tells me, this looks bad, why don't you get a new car?"

That patient was already in bad shape; he was an elderly person, even using an oxygen tank. He didn't speak, maybe he'd shed a tear every now and then. By now he has already died. There were two places I had to bring the patients from. One was the waiting room where the ambulances dropped them off—I picked them up there and brought them in as the machines freed up. They came from hospitals, nursing homes, even houses—people without legs, people who couldn't move. And other patients I picked up from the nursing home upstairs. The nurses left the chairs ready next to the elevator. That day was like any other day. I opened the elevator door, brought the chair in, went down to the first floor. The chairs have reclining positions, you adjust them so the patient is comfortable, and this patient was completely lying down, knees extended forward because he was in bad shape.

I got out of the elevator and turned around the aisle. There was one, two, three doors. The last door before the dialysis area—there the aisle was narrow, you had to open the door with one hand and pull the chair with the other. And you had to pull hard so the door wouldn't hit the patient's feet. These people are sick, often their feet are blistered, you can't touch them, sometimes not even cover them with a sheet. So I had to stand on the side, one hand holding the door, the other stretching to pull the chair forward. And as I pull the chair [a lo que pego el jalón] the mechanism controlling the reclining positions gets loose [se zafa el seguro de lo que mantiene el reclinable de la silla]. I know the chair was defective, they really missed out on suing the

manufacturer for that. That thing gets loose and the chair goes automatically down with all the weight pulling me down. The chair alone was more than 100 lbs, the patient was almost 300. It felt so abrupt that my hand went along with the weight. I felt a jerk in my back [Sentí que me sacudió la espalda].

Someone was around and saw me trying to get the chair back up—the patient had been left feet up and head down. She helped me and got the door so I could pass. I had to weigh the patient, write the weight down, take his temperature, his blood pressure; then take him to the dialysis area and leave him next to the machine. Everyone was too busy and I was writhing in pain [yo estuve torciéndome ahí]. I managed to finish, but was already injured. I asked someone there to help me bring the other patients, and then it was up to the technicians, they controlled the blood process with the machines. My job was to do the medicine supply: bring all the instruments from the storage and put them in the cabinets. And I stretched my arm to reach one of the packs of syringes from the top shelf and felt this pinch in my back. One of the supervisors comes in, what's wrong with you, she says. I tell her, this happened to me, I can't reach this box up there, my back hurts. Leave it, she told me, go to see the nurse and ask her to give you medicine and to make a report for you.

The nurse was busy, and of course I couldn't do the report myself, it was all in English. I saw the administrative manager instead; she was my protector—she was the receptionist when I began, and she helped me with the papers and everything; she kind of had a crush on me, blowing me kisses and all. Don't worry, she tells me. And she made a report that was super good—really beneficial to me. I go out to see the main nurse, the general manager, because she had to sign it, but she had already left. So my supervisor is there and tells me, don't worry, leave me the form here, I'll have it

signed for you. The next day I go to see her and tell her that I need the paper: You know what, she tells me, there are a few little things [unas cositas] we'll have to change. I go to see her the next day: Oh, you know what, I've forgotten. The next day: Oh, you know what—almost a week went by and I didn't have the paper. They were not going to give it to me; I could see they were acting in bad faith.

So one afternoon I'm there with my cousin and the main nurse was there—my cousin tells her, please, this is what happened, please help my cousin. She tries to find the report but no one has it, they've made it disappear. It's fine, she says, no problem, and goes to the doctor's desk and gets an empty form. She asked me what happened and fills it out and signs it right there. But she only wrote half—why couldn't she write more [qué costaba poner más] I don't know. If she had put that my hips hurt, for instance, the doctors would have had to treat me for that too. Now, I get nothing. That's the trick [mala jugada] they played on me. She made a copy and gave me the original. The next morning my supervisor called me, Julio, I got this from the nurse, go to the insurance and see your doctor.

I came to see this doctor nearby, and he gave me medicine for the pain, and so the process got started. He sent me to do X-rays—and then to physical therapy. From then on I kept getting worse—I had to wrap my legs tight with tape so I could walk. The last days I got out of work, drove for four blocks, and had to stop. It hurt too much. By then I went to see a neurologist and he recommended injections for the pain. But my doctor here said the injections were useless—you'll need surgery, he said. And he said I couldn't work like this. It's impossible, you may be suddenly paralyzed [tú vas a quedar por ahí de repente inmóvil]; you have to rest and do therapy. He gave me disability [el disability], first for one week, two weeks, one month—and then

indefinitely. And that's been it up to this day. Then it was the problem with the insurance—the clinic didn't have insurance, so they made it look like I worked for the nursing home. I worked until March, but working was obviously making it worse.

Although I asked him several times about the accident and also heard him tell it to others, I never understood it completely. The chair he was moving failed and caught him in a bad position, somehow pulling him down and hurting his back; the damage expanded through his nerves up to his neck and down to his lower back and legs. Though the accident can be blamed on the failing chair, the connection between the chair and his injury is unclear. What was it? After years doing heavy physical work and handling dangerous tools, Julio got injured pushing a chair on wheels. Compared to other on-the-job accidents, Julio's looked almost trivial, difficult to explain, difficult to translate into English—and difficult to fit into the small space in the standardized forms. From the beginning there were problems in filling out the report and establishing the facts, including the extent of his injuries. Some remote corner of his nervous system had been shattered and pain went back and forth—but what was it? As he puts it, then “the process got started,” and it did so from an unclear starting point; doubts would linger on.¹³¹

Soon after leaving the job he filed a claim at the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). He went to see a lawyer—he had seen the ads on TV—and started getting both medical and cash benefits. In the beginning he was paid \$400 per week, the maximum the law allowed at the time, though it was less than what he was making when employed (more than \$600). Three months later he was sent for a so-called independent medical examination (IME), and his compensation was cut in half.¹³² As

¹³¹ The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2008 38.6% of all non-fatal occupational injuries and illnesses belong in the category “Sprains, strains, tears” (BLS 2009: 14).

¹³² According to New York State Workers' Compensation law, injured workers do not get full compensation unless they are deemed totally disabled; and total disability is not determined by ability to

for the medical treatment, the WCB mandated Julio's insurance company to pay for physical therapy and other treatment, including the injections for pain. When I met him he was seeing four different doctors: his primary doctor, near his place in Sunnyside; the chiropractor, also nearby, whom Julio went to for physical therapy three times a week; an orthopedic surgeon in Flushing, who believed only surgery could work; and the pain doctor administering the injections.

The accident has been a turning point in his life. A different period has begun. For one thing, the coordination between the different doctors, the WCB, and the insurance company is an intricate process. He has become an expert in this complex paperwork, carefully keeping track of his mail and patiently trekking through countless medical and administrative appointments. And yet for the first time in many years Julio had plenty of time. Unable to work and with little money in his pocket, migration has lost its point. Too sick and tired to go back to work, too young and poor to quit working, what could he do now? Looking to sending injured workers back to work, the WCB tried to help. He was called for an interview with a specialist in retraining and relocating workers in the job market.

Disabled for physical work and with no other experience, Julio was not an easy case. What were his chances of not relying on his body to work? In Julio's eyes, the interview represented the coveted door out of manual work. But it was also dangerous: the WCB could end up cutting his benefits and sending him to do any kind of work. He wanted to show he was able to work—but not to do any kind of work. When she asked him about his education level and he said he had completed the 9th grade, it looked as if she had secretly closed the door on him. Before quickly finishing the interviews she made a referral for Julio to take ESL and computer classes and

work—Julio was not deemed able to work; only when something is missing—let us say an arm—does the WCB provide full compensation. Not having missed anything and still able to move, Julio was categorized as only partially disabled, receiving \$200 per week from then on.

promised to send him more information in the mail—but her attitude suggested little faith.¹³³

Under pressure from the insurance company, the WCB has been eager to cut this transition period short. “They want to send me back to work,” he knows. When Julio got sent for another IME, he asked me to videotape the consultation; like other injured workers, he wanted to have something he could confront the doctor’s report with. “Move your neck to the right,” the doctor told him, and Julio tried but could not move an inch, his face distorted in pain. “Move it to the left,” she said, obviously bored. Julio’s neck would not move. He has had different studies done—X-rays, MRIs, even an EMG (electromyogram)—but the results have been inconclusive. Without these tests tipping the scales in any direction, his symptoms—his pain level

¹³³ I went with him to the interview and afterwards took notes: *We got to the WCB much too early. Julio bought coffee and a muffin for me at the small store downstairs. From the lobby you can see the store next door, which sells expensive furniture. It’s a strange view to have from the WCB’s lobby. We had our coffee standing up as we watched and commented on the furniture. Julio worked at a furniture factory so he knows about furniture and remarked upon some details of the pieces on display. Time went by fast. We went upstairs, checked in, and were called in quickly. The office is a small and impersonal box; a desk, three chairs, and a computer connected to the WCB database. The interviewer was a woman in her early forties. She was nice and friendly but rather superficially so. Julio introduced me as his friend so I went in with him. She looked up his file in the computer. Then she asked about the accident. Julio started speaking in English but then turned to me and asked me for help (can you help me [me ayuda], he said). Only then did the woman seem to realize there was a language issue. She asked what Julio’s language was, but it made no difference. Julio described the accident in detail and I did my best to translate. She seemed to be of good will and understanding. We went over the dates. The accident was in October 2006 but Julio worked until March 2007. She asked what job he had before the clinic. He said that for about a year he worked by himself—mostly doing painting and other home improvements. She asked Julio how many years of schooling he had. I felt bad he had to answer in front of me—this is something we had never talked about. It may be that he wasn’t entirely comfortable answering—he said something about the education system being different in Ecuador—but then he answered straightforwardly: he went to school up to the ninth grade, but later took some professional training class in commerce or business. To my surprise she asked about Julio’s immigration status. Softly, very softly, he said, I’m citizen. Then she got into some possibilities for training. She never said what the point of the meeting was. It looks like once the judge determines that you can go back to work, at least partially, they have you go through this retraining and job placement system. We told her about the class Julio was taking (to be a paralegal). She nodded approvingly, but Julio said his problem was English, and lack of computer skills. So she came up with some possibilities for him to study English and also acquire computer skills. Then Julio mentioned interest in becoming a dialysis technician, which she also approved of. She told us about a program that could fund the training for dialysis technician. We filled out an application for that program; she made a referral, and said that he was going to be contacted for an interview soon. Then she was in a rush and the meeting finished abruptly. She gave Julio her card and told him to get in touch with her if he needed her. As we walked out Julio looked happy and invited me to eat lunch.*

when prompted to move—have had to be accepted as evidence. In the judge's eyes his disability to work is dubious, and that is why he has already cut his benefits in half. Julio plays his role well: it is not difficult to do it, he is in pain. But he is also tired. After years of hard physical work, he looks forward to something different.

But what? When Julio came to the United States he left his job skills back in Ecuador. It was clear from the beginning: here he would have to rely on his hands. When more than fifteen years later his body said no more, an opportunity for change opened up. At his age it is not so easy to start something new. What Julio may secretly imagine is going back to the past. Is there any chance to dust off his old skills? Is there any chance to recreate—here in New York City—the man he was back in Ecuador? His mind plays with many different options; it looks as if his future were in his past.

IV. Mejor ver más allá [Better to see further beyond]

Six months into working for a books distributor in Cuenca, Julio saw the opportunity to become independent. Sales suited him well. Book sales suited him better. Driving from one place to another and talking his way into offices and schools, carefully dressed and with the catalogs in his briefcase, Julio was siding with progress: selling technical books was selling the promise of progress. From dictionaries and encyclopedias to mechanics manuals and cookbooks—in the latest editions just arrived from Barcelona—the books he sold were tokens of social mobility: middle-class dreams, on installments.

When the plans for migrating began Julio was in his early 30s and confident. But it had not always been like that; the journey had already been long. His memories go far back: he says he remembers breast feeding from his mother, and also when his eldest brother died of measles at seven years of age. The third of nine siblings, second

among the living, Julio was born in a very small town in Azuay Province, 40 miles of bad roads from the city of Cuenca in the Ecuadorian Southern highlands.

The thing is that my parents—their lives have been very sad. My dad lost his father when he was 6, and his mother died when he was 11 or 12. You can imagine. My mom she lost her father when she was 14. My grandmother—on my mom's side—had about ten daughters, and she was left by herself with the whole package. So their life has been too hard. When they get married, it's two 20 year-old people getting married, without one penny in their pockets, without one strip of land, without anything, to start off their struggle [a hacer su lucha]. And to fill up with children. So what can they give?

That's where the struggle comes from; I mean, poverty. Poverty and an excessive pride [orgullo desmedido]—because they come from a family that's been very rich—before us. My grandmother's parents owned lots of land [una barbaridad de tierras] and these were lands that produced lots. Back then they had peons—but peons with no wages, only working for food and a bad place to sleep. And their children continued working for the master [amo]. Some say that this old man's father had been an Army general or something like that—my grandmother's father. How he had come to leave his children there I don't know.

But they thought about education, though education for them was not going to school to learn to read and write or that kind of thing—for them it was to be either priest or doctor. Nothing else, that was the problem. That's why we had several almost-priests [casi curas] in the family—because no one was an actual priest. That was the only family that saw that people have to study. They've all studied, they're all professionals, my mom's cousins. But in my grandmother's case she couldn't give

anything, only up to the fourth grade, that's what there was back then; and the school was in the lots and house of my great-grandmother herself.

On my dad's side they were more passive. The problem with my dad—he became an orphan early on. There were four brothers, my dad the eldest one. And they couldn't even help each other. There was an uncle who was kind of wealthy [medio millonario]; but the thing is that he liked the fast life, gambling, drinking, women. He didn't help his nephews. The people left for other places, other towns. That's the way they grew up, very poor. And so one has been seeing some families so rich and one so poor. My mom's uncles, for instance: they were very rich. We didn't have anything. Then my mom's cousins went to study, they left, went to high school, college, started changing everything.

And so we started changing too—in my case, for instance; I never saw myself as plowing the land or living there. Not that I knew anything else, either. But I told myself that maybe it's better to see further beyond [pero ya a lo mejor a ver más allá].

The eight living siblings would eventually leave the village for somewhere else—three are now in the United States and three in Spain. Julio was the first. He went to work in La Troncal, in the coastal area of the Cantón Cañar, in the beginning seasonally, then settling for several years. The town had emerged in the 1950s as migrants from the Southern Highlands arrived looking for work, and had grown in the 1960s to accommodate the workers at AZTRA, an enormous sugar-mill that started producing in 1968.

Labor unrest stirred the cane fields and workers' camps from early on. After several attempts the first union was established in 1972. Strikes were organized every

year, slowly pushing the company to collective bargaining and finally reaching significant agreements [contrato colectivos] in 1974 and 1976. In 1977 the union went to strike and took over the company to demand compliance. The management heard no reasoning and mobilized its connection with the military government to have the workers evicted. About 100 workers were killed: October 18th, 1977 became known as the AZTRA massacre.¹³⁴

Even though Julio was then off in the Army, this is one of the first stories he tells me. He heard it from two brothers who were working in the mill, and then from fellow workers when he came back. By then the union was already recovering, and he started to get involved. “The organization was strong. I learned little by little, and then got to be a union leader [dirigente sindical] myself.” He would go with the workers to see the boss when there was a problem or they needed something, and he would sit down at the negotiating table with the company representatives. His role required knowledge of the labor regulations, particularly the collective bargaining agreement; but also the ability to gauge how far he could push and when it was better to withdraw.

After military service Julio stayed in the Reserves and was summoned to the Army no less than eight times. “I went on my own, no one forced me to go. My parents didn’t want me to do it—I said no: I want to be there. I want to wear that uniform and carry my rifle.” In 1981 Ecuador attempted to make inroads into long-disputed territory with its neighbor to the South, Perú, and Julio was mobilized. While the incident was quickly over and he did not see any combat action, it did reinforce his commitment: “Little Ecuador has faced up to Perú [El Ecuador tan pequeño le ha

¹³⁴ The information about La Troncal and AZTRA is from Víctor Granda Aguilar’s (1979) *La masacre de AZTRA*. Granda was active in Ecuadorian socialism. Julio met him several times. Once the police had cleared the area, the military thought it better to get rid of the bodies. It was said that they threw them into the sugar cane presses and the huge industrial boilers where sugar was processed. “Many years later they’d keep finding shoe soles in the presses,” Julio says.

hecho frente al Perú].” More than an actual military experience, the so-called Paquisha war made Julio fluent in the language of national pride.

Back in AZTRA Julio was popular among workers and quickly rose through the union ranks: at some point he even had his own driver. “When you are there you get to see how things really work [se conoce toda la verdad],” he tells me, and suggests that things did not work as they should have. “You can do good and bad. It’s just like politics. If you want to help yourself you can do it—by harming everyone else. The boss buys out the leaders so they favor the company—money and visas for the United States. But in my case they were wrong. One million Sucres they offered me—I said no.”

Quite soon his memories of the Army turn sour as well. The idealistic man who wanted to wear his country’s uniform is called into question. After lunch we pick up *Ecuador News*: “Ecuadorian Soldier Dies in Iraq,” reads the front page. “So sad,” I tell him. “That’s how it is,” Julio replies, and tells me about his own time in the Army. “When I got out I thought about it carefully. I lost one year. I learned many things, but I calculated: how much have I lost in earnings this year?” And when his younger brother said he wanted to join the Army, Julio talked him out of it: “In the Army there’s too much injustice—people there are mean [sádicos]. One does something wrong and everyone gets punished.”

Julio’s reminiscences change their tone: one moment he romanticizes them, next moment he moves away from them. His self-portrayal as an idealistic soldier and union leader gets blurry. He contrasts his time in the Army with the money he could have earned had he kept his regular job. And amidst the fight for workers’ rights at AZTRA, he drops references to crooked leaders accepting bribes and visas for the United States. Through his union work at AZTRA Julio got involved with the PSRE (Revolutionary Socialist Party of Ecuador) and was active in politics, even after

leaving the sugar mill. And yet at some point “I realized that the masses, as they say, are taken advantage of.”

When did Julio’s memories change? His mention of the visas as part of the bribes offered to union leaders suggests that the present is shaping the past. His reassessment of his time in the military seems connected to more recent priorities: the money he could have earned. And even one of his complaints about military authority—“One does something wrong and everyone gets punished”—betrays an unexpected individualism. Are present anxieties blemishing his memories? But it is also possible that the picture started changing long ago. In fact, the whole country changed. Two years after the AZTRA massacre, the military left power and Jaime Roldós was elected president. Julio remembers Roldós as the best president Ecuador ever had. On May 24th, 1981, however, the President’s plane crashed, and no one on board survived.¹³⁵ The Roldós years had found Julio in his early twenties: his best years as union leader and soldier. Along with the plane an era and its voices seemed to go away. Still in 1982 Julio volunteered to fight in the Malvinas war, and through the early 1980s he was still active with the PSRE and the Workers’ Federation of Azuay. But something was not the same. By the mid-1980s he was already well established in the technical books business. His labor and political organizing had prepared him for sales; books could also pitched as a way to change someone’s life.

Some 18 years after leaving Cuenca for Queens, what is left of the person he was? Traces of his union background show in his interactions with lawyers, doctors, and other people connected to his WCB case here in New York City, tactically watching them, neither angry nor complacent, quickly calculating his relative negotiating strength. Flashes of the old ideas have also survived: they are somewhat present in his participation in the Queens community organization where I met him;

¹³⁵ On the never entirely clear death of President Roldós: Galarza Zavala (1982) and Perkins (2004).

and somewhat more clearly in his support for current Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa's moderate revival of anti-imperialist pride.¹³⁶

I used to hate this country. I was radical. I was young and radical like all young people. High school students there [allá los muchachos de colegio] are all revolutionaries. When people spoke of this country it was all bad: that the yanquis this and the yanquis that. It's now that I reason differently. The culprit is not the people or the government here. The culprit is our governments. When I talk to communists—real communists—I tell them: each father has to take care of his own children. And this country will do anything—even go and kill people—to take care of Americans. Instead our governments . . .

The transfer of blame and guilt from the United States to the Latin American government echoes an extended change of paradigm. In Julio's case it is a reaction to those who are still unaware that no one will take care of them; there is no point in blaming someone else. It is the crude approach he learned in New York City,

¹³⁶ On November 15th, 2008, an Ecuadorian political organization put together an homage to “the martyrs of November 15th, 1922” and the workers killed in the AZTRA massacre on October 18th, 1977—in Queens. The two dates are part of Ecuadorian working-class memory. Several former workers at AZTRA were present, including one of the main speakers. In addition to paying tribute to the fallen workers, the ceremony was dedicated to Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian immigrant killed by seven high school students on Long Island a few days before. Historic symbols made space for newer and more immediate ones, and the speakers strove to draw continuities between the workers' struggles back home, the assassination of Lucero (stabbed to death on his way to watch a DVD at his friend's place), and other present-day claims. “The red thread of history,” one speaker tried—but the bridge was difficult to sustain. Even more difficult, another speaker took advantage of the occasion to complain about the recent incentives for Ecuadorians to return home, particularly the “way too low” \$15,000-tax exemption to bring cars back into the country. After referring to the AZTRA massacre—which he himself had witnessed—and the long history of class struggle, he asked the audience whether anyone believed that less-than-\$15,000 cars could survive “our stony streets [nuestras calles pedregosas]”—without ever dropping his passionate tone. The speeches, in turn, were followed by traditional Ecuadorian music and dances. From the tribute to the martyrs to the killing of an immigrant to the \$15,000-tax exemption for returnees to folklore: one rainy Saturday evening, past and present, in Queens. A few weeks after the tribute I visited one of the AZTRA workers I had met there in the bare—desolate—room where he lived in a crowded house on Northern Boulevard (Queens). He called two other AZTRA former workers and the three of them told me in minute-by-minute detail the story of the massacre, which they all had witnessed, 31 years ago.

expressed through the parallel—responsible government and responsible fathers—that touches him the most. Several hours drinking, however, and the past can find its way back. His shirt half-open, his hair uncombed, I can hear him sing about evil landowners [gamonales] and what will happen to them. (It is 4 in the morning, though, and the next day the image is lost.)

Scattered and incomplete, the stories from Julio's life in Ecuador still hint at the man he was. His memories do not suggest roots at the local or family level: he was constantly on the move. They suggest a more abstract type of belonging: he was fluent in ideas and early on incorporated the languages of nation and class into his own. This was the skill underlying his charisma—his ability to talk his way up into organizing and sales. The first time I told him I studied sociology he said he would have liked to study that: "To talk prettily [para hablar bonito]." Upon emigrating to the United States Julio left language behind. Much had happened since leaving the village where he was born. His life had already been long. Stringing together the themes of his time—socialism and nation, modernization and progress—much of his social trajectory had ridden on the peddling of words: handsome words.

V. He Arado en el Mar [I Have Plowed in the Sea]

After regularizing his immigration status in 2002, Julio traveled to Ecuador for the first time in 12 years. When he had left Cuenca his daughter was 6. An 18 year-old woman took the bus from Cuenca to Guayaquil to meet him at the airport. After Julio's divorce, the relationship with his former in-laws had been bad. The child was living with her maternal grandparents, who tried to keep her away from him and his family. After she turned 11 he talked to her on the phone and announced her that from then on he would send the money under her name, not her grandmother's.

My daughter here is super smart [vivísima]—but the one in Ecuador was much more intelligent than her. This one here is excitable [explosiva], the other one was more quiet [así calmadita, muy quieta]—very careful [demasiado ordenada]. I had this desk and typewriter where I'd do the numbers, contracts, all—and any piece of paper that maybe fell to the floor she'd tell me: Look, Papi, you dropped this letter. My children here—forget about it! They'll leave it there, they'll kick it around, they couldn't care less.

He saw her at the airport, she ran into his arms. Was it possible to make up for the lost time? We are watching one of the cases before Doctor Polo, a Cuban judge arbitrating between volunteer participants on TV. The parties are a Colombian father and his adult son. The father has come back to his son after many years of absence; he looks for forgiveness. The son is reluctant—he has learned to live without his father and suspects the father has come back because he is getting too old to work. Doctor Polo pushes them to sit next to each other. “I want you to give me a hug,” the father says. The son feels the pressure. He looks at Doctor Polo; from the bench she nods him on. “OK,” the son says, “I will forgive you—but don't you think of asking for anything.” They hug. “That step alone is more than 50%,” Julio concludes. “The old man will have to fight, beg, humiliate himself—but in the end it can work.”

I was there for five weeks and didn't even have time to visit the whole family. I spent most of my time with my daughter, but it was worth it. I could see she felt comfortable, she felt good. She didn't complain [No me hizo berrinche]. You know others have had a very difficult time with the children they've left—not my daughter. I took her to school, waited for her outside, took her for lunch. We went out, sometimes we took her classmates. And we talked for a little while, and I told her that I didn't want to talk too much about her mother—that's something affecting both her and me. I said, well, life

played a bad trick on us, not only you but me too, unfortunately the two of us. Of course her question was why it had to be her—if she was a child and had done no harm, why did she have to be abandoned like that. Why were others lucky enough to be with their parents, and not her. So then I explained her: Look, you're not a child anymore, you're a grown up, you have to understand. It wasn't out of meanness [No fue por maldad], it was a bad decision, and look where we are now [y mira dónde estamos]. It took time before I could come back, but now I am here, I want to support you, I want to give you everything I can. The time we lost can't be recovered, but, if you want, we can start over again. She started crying, but didn't say anything, never said anything bad. And she never asked me for anything. Never.

Julio did not fool himself and perceived that “maybe she did bear me a little grudge [un pequeño rencor].” But she had understood that it had not been “abandonment out of contempt [no fue un abandono así como por desprecio], and that the original idea was to come back in two or three years, not more than that—otherwise I would not have left. But then the two years turned into . . . almost never.”

And that's the immigrant's life. He has no choice, there's no solution. When you make the decision to leave and leave behind what you love most—it's thinking to give them a better life. But then everything changes, and if people are ungrateful—then there's no way. There're some that their parents are there and they throw it in their face: Why haven't you done anything for us? Why don't you give us anything? And they can't justify it. We're poor! Others go to the United States or Spain and look what they give to their children, look how much the neighbors have. But once they've left, then it's why have you abandoned me. Even if we had to eat soil we would have been together, we would have had someone to give us love and take care of us—no one has taken care of us.

Slowly, methodically, Julio worked to recover her daughter's trust through the twelve-year gap. Toward the end of his five weeks in Cuenca the connection between daughter and father had improved. His daughter had a boyfriend, though, and a few days before he left the boyfriend talked to Julio and asked him for his daughter's hand (she was still a minor). Julio would not let this interfere with his long-crafted plan: to bring his daughter to the United States. He had gone through so much, now he wanted to open up this possibility for her. He did the paperwork, she got her green card and traveled to New York City, so much more easily than he had. Soon he got her an interview to work at Delgado Travel, an Ecuadorian-owned travel agency with impressive headquarters on Roosevelt Avenue in Queens.

My daughter is an Evangelical; she wears long skirts all the way down—and Delgado Travel likes skirts really short. There were some fifteen other girls, most of them Colombian, you can imagine, terrific bodies [cuerpazos] and all. I tell her, you have to dress well, especially for the interview. Yes, Papi, don't worry. She wore a blue jean skirt, really not well dressed [no bien presentada]. And we went to the interview. I was sitting there, outside. First she was asked about her residency: And how did you get this? You had to show your papers. My Papi gave it to me, he sponsored me and I came. What can you do? This and this and here are the certificates from the classes I've taken. And where did you learn all this? In Cuenca. Experience? I worked at this place and this place. And that was it. You can start next week.

First day they assigned her to packages and boxes. Second day they transferred her to cashier. And third day they already appointed her manager for all the cashier department. It's the certificates she had brought, that's what it was. She had taken computer classes, she knew lots about the internet, she was really up-to-date. And the work she had done in college. So she was perfect for the job. She said she was the

envy of all the other women there. And it wasn't bad: making \$480 or \$560 a week after all the deductions, and that was the beginning. It was summer when she started, good AC, everything nice. I went over and left her \$20 so she went for lunch—they didn't give her an exact time to eat, so I couldn't take her for lunch—but I brought her the money so she could eat.

But then it was maybe four months after she'd started that she came one day—you know, Papi, I'm leaving for Ecuador. I don't want this anymore, this is not good. I guessed the boyfriend was calling and calling. I told her, look—I talked to her nicely: you're already working, you can get something better. This job now, you can get some experience, experience here is very important. Then you'll get something better somewhere else. I wanted her to take an English class—but she already knew English! Just arrived she already knew. She didn't want to and then started again that she was leaving. Why, I asked her, you can stay, work, petition him, file the application. And then you can go every six months, spend one month there, then come back, work, then you go again, and this way you won't have any problem. You can save all the money you earn, you don't have to pay rent, not even food. What else can someone ask for! I tell her, there're people who don't have anyone, I didn't have anyone when I came. Look, if you leave and when you come back they won't take you back at this job, it doesn't matter! There are millions of other offices where you can work. But no. She left.

And well that's when she told me, you know what, Papi, the thing is that when I came I didn't know I was pregnant. OK, I tell her. Then at least have your baby here! She leaves and she doesn't come back. When I ask her why she hasn't come back, she tells me something about the airlines—that was a lie. I tell her the least you could have

done is come here and have your child here. And that's when she said—the reason is that I wanted to have an Ecuadorian son. From then on I haven't talked to her about that. From then on I've said no—it's already too much [porque ya es el colmo]. How can you go against the tide [cómo uno puede luchar contra la corriente]? It's impossible . . . It's impossible . . .

They hate this country and live off this country. Many people are like that. They hate it and where do they go? I hated this country too: and where am I? Yes. But here there're opportunities—young people here can get trained [capacitarse], look for a better life. It's not like the people who don't have any profession, that's hard. But if you can prepare yourself then there're lots of opportunities. There're so many jobs looking for people—and well paid jobs. But there's no point . . . you can't go against the tide. Like I say or like Bolívar said: I have tried to plow in the sea [He arado en el mar]. That's the famous phrase.

Fake solemnity inflects his voice as he quotes Bolívar, the Liberator of Ecuador, who before dying poor and in bitter exile regretted that the work of his lifetime had been in vain. From his bleak corner in Queens Julio makes the words of the Liberator his own; if men as great as Bolívar have failed, what is left for the rest? The quote blames the others, not him—he did plow—but does not hide his disappointment. “I wanted to have an Ecuadorian son,” she told him, and that was more than he could take. He went through so much to come to this country and gain legal status; she turned him down. He was finally able to offer her and his grandson access to this world of opportunity; she wanted her son to be Ecuadorian. I tell him that he used to be as proudly Ecuadorian as she seems to be now.

We're talking about something else. The situation is different now. In Ecuador the struggle to improve the economic situation could not be continued. And now a new door has opened up—a door that opens up many other opportunities. And it's something that has cost me much—and it has cost her much; otherwise I would have come back earlier to see her—one year and that's it. So that's what I can't understand: why they are so reluctant [por qué se ponen renuentes así]. You see to it that they can make progress: study, make money. But it's all as if they wanted to punish me—harming themselves at the same time.

Sometimes Julio thinks that it is laziness: “She has always lived well—having domestic servants to take care of her even before she was born.” But that is not it: “She is an Evangelical and she is always talking about God—and Evangelicals are always attacking materialism. She says that people here are too materialistic. They think only of money and that's why they leave their children behind and go their way. She says that she wants to keep what she has; that she has seen that she can't be by herself, that she needed someone, and that this someone is there, and she doesn't want to live away from him, and doesn't want her child to be away from him. She does not want to repeat the story.” Julio pauses for a few seconds. The two of us are sitting in his living room, the winter light is almost gone; he lowers his eyes and whispers: “Perhaps there she is right.”

The divergent paths of father and daughter highlight the interaction between lives and ideas in the changing Ecuadorian map. Both socialism and Evangelicalism opened up roads past the country's Catholic background—two massive roads to modernization, to use an old-fashioned word.¹³⁷ But things work out strangely. Socialism took Julio out of the village where he was born and all the way to the United

¹³⁷ Sociologist and former president Osvaldo Hurtado (2010: 119) reports that “In 2006, Protestants came to represent 11 percent of the national population, with an upward trend.”

States, where he thought to find opportunities for his daughter, if not for himself. Evangelicalism, much more widespread than socialism in the United States, provided his daughter the words—the verses—to denounce her father’s focus on money, and to reject the opportunities he had worked so hard to obtain.

VI. Cangrejos Hispanos [Hispanic Crabs]

When looking over his experience in this country, there is one phrase Julio likes: “I don’t know if I’ve told you,” he tells me, “that I came here to pay for my pride [soberbia]—there’s no other reason why I came.” The word he uses in Spanish—soberbia—is one of the seven deadly sins (superbia, in Latin) and pride seems to be the English term for it. Dante’s definition was “love of self perverted to hatred and contempt for one’s neighbor.” Unlike “soberbia,” however, “pride” is used in different ways: labeled “the deadliest of the deadly sins,” it is often praised as a virtue as well.

Scholars distinguish between three types of pride: vanity, conceit, and arrogance. “The conceited closely resemble the vain in that they, too, depend on others to sustain the conviction of their own excellence, but they differ in the nature of their dependence. While the vain need others to reflect a flattering image of themselves, the conceited use them as that against which their own superiority may be measured.” Arrogance “shares certain crucial features with vanity and conceit, but it also has a further characteristic which sets it apart from these and makes it the more deadly: it is wholly self-referential.” Unlike the vain and the conceited, the arrogant are “indifferent to admiration and approval from others,” and “see themselves as being on a different plane, as being superior and unique.”¹³⁸

A long tradition of thought, however, as well as the common use of the word, have questioned this characterization of pride. “We inherit from Christianity a very

¹³⁸ The quotes are from Taylor 2006: 70-82.

strong prejudice . . . against all those forms of self-affirmation that we may sum up under the heading pride.” Rather than vanity being one form of pride, the two can also be seen as different altogether: “A man who refuses to something because he is too vain may be moved entirely by his appearance in the eyes of others—in the sense of the figure he cuts. A man who refuses to something out of pride may be moved by a sense of what he is, what is due to him, what it would be shameful or dishonorable to do.”¹³⁹

I tell Julio that an Ecuadorian young woman the two of us know complained to me about immigrants putting on airs about how important they were back home. Julio understands. “She is a nice person, she may be humble,” he says. “But in my case . . . In the beginning my ego was too big. Too much I-was [yo fui]: I was this, I was that. That’s the main problem here: the I-was thing [el yo fui].” Getting over yourself, thinks Julio, is what makes it so difficult. Immigrants are slow to give up their past, and it is the contrast that hurts.

Everything changed and it has taken long to pay back. His world fell apart and the ordeal began: from his nice house in Cuenca to sharing a room and apartment with “people with no manners”; from managing his own business to working at the bosses’ and coworkers’ whims; from reigning over his home to having no home at all. For the first time in his life, Julio’s self-confidence shrank. Used to driving around, he now walked to save the \$1 subway token. Used to speaking before crowds, he now could not speak: the simplest interactions in English were too much. Words became useless: his hands were all he had. Julio had talked his way up; manual work would teach him otherwise.

Julio survived the difficult first months. He found a job, then another. Things did not get better: he cried and thought of returning to Ecuador; his family offered to

¹³⁹ The quotes are from Casey 1990: 46-8.

send him the ticket back, even if he was in debt and had nothing left. And it was then that someone came along, saw the state he was in, and simply spat in his face: “Die, you son of a bitch, but die here [Muérete hijoeputa, pero muérete acá].” The phrase did the trick. “No one’s going to welcome you, no one’s going to give you anything, no one’s going to be sorry for you.” It was a turning point. His old “pride [soberbia]” had made his life in New York City miserable; his new “pride” let him stand his ground. The pride Julio brought from Ecuador was costly in New York City—but he slowly paid back. In the processes he brewed a new sort of pride.

One day after lunch Julio tells me his version of the crab fable: “At the places where they sell live crabs you can see they have two baskets. In one basket they have Asian crabs, in the other Hispanic crabs. The Asian basket is covered, the Hispanic one is open. Why is that? Because the Asian crabs will help each other out of the basket. The Hispanic crabs can’t go anywhere—as soon as one tries to get out the others pull it down.” I ask him why there is such difference; he looks at me like I did not get the joke. He prefers parables to explaining, but I insist. The answer is not straightforward: “At least in my country the people with no education come here, start off as dishwasher, and move up. Instead someone who’s educated—he starts off as dishwasher, suffers much more, and gets stuck as dishwasher.”

There are differences between Ecuadorian immigrants, Julio seems to say. Back in Ecuador the differences are clear—there are different baskets. Migration has put different live animals in the same basket, and this makes solidarity difficult among imprisoned Hispanic crabs. Julio can see the problem, it seems, but he also knows that Ecuadorian divisions run deep and go far back in time. The crabs may all be thrown into one basket, but they do not forget who they are.

His opinions on music are strong: “In that sense Ecuador is hopeless. Young people only listen to music from abroad.” When visiting Ecuador in 2002—after 12

years of absence—he and his family took an afternoon trip to a village not far from Cuenca. When they were about to leave a band started playing. “I liked it so I stood there to watch, and told the others to wait. But they said, no, you don’t want to listen to that. I like this, I told them, I even knew the lyrics. That’s an Indian thing, they say, it’s a cholo thing.” Having been abroad for so long, Julio had the authority to explain. “No, I tell them. If you leave the country you will remember this.” When telling me about a New Year’s Eve party organized by rural Ecuadorian migrants in Queens, however, his attitude is not the same: “And the music was all—it was all their own style, so I didn’t really fit in. I like traditional music, Andean music. But local music I don’t like. I do like the originals, yes. But not that.”

The one thing Julio remembers about President Roldós is that he was the first one to welcome country people [*gente de poncho*] in his office. Current President Correa does it too. But from the President receiving country people in his office to Julio’s sharing room or New Year with them—it is different. Julio can talk about his fellow countrymen and proudly listen to Ecuadorian music. When visiting Ecuador, moreover, where the boundaries are clearly in place, he can scold his family for rejecting their cultural heritage. But in New York City Ecuadorians are too close, there are too many of them, and the distinctions are blurred. Politics had let him elevate himself above the old divisions, constructing an idea of nation where everyone was equal. In immigrant New York City there is no space for politics or ideas. The rooms are too small and the music is too loud: abstraction cannot be afforded. People step over the boundaries as if there were no differences left.

As he looks to the future Julio is trying to make out the road ahead. He distinguishes between uneducated immigrants who start off as dishwashers and manage to climb the ladder, although at high physical cost; and more educated immigrants who start as dishwashers and get stuck as dishwashers. “There are

professionals who come from our countries to wash dishes. They just got here [recién llegaditos] and they're told they'll make \$300 a week; in Ecuador I made \$300 a month, they say. And that work kills you. It's the hardest and worst-paid: restaurants. And people go there anyway." Julio washed dishes only for a month, but like the professionals he mentions, he also got stuck in unskilled work. At a low hourly wage, putting in lots of time is the only way to make up. "I want to make twice as much," he says, "but not work twice as much."

Training and specializing seem to be the answer he has in mind, the only way to escape the immigrant trap. He took a class to work as a paralegal at Queensborough Community College; he graduated and his photograph is on the internet, along the others in the class. Neither his English nor his computer skills seem to be enough to actually start that kind of work on his own, and he may not be young enough to be employed by an already established office. On TV at the restaurant where we are eating one of his classmates runs his own advertisement. He started working in this area long before taking the class, Julio explains.

It is the last day of the year and one of my last days in New York City. I go with Julio to the WCB. We are waiting for his lawyer to call his name. People walking with canes, limping, dragging their feet, expecting to learn the latest on their case, worn manila-paper envelopes sitting on their laps. I walk with Julio into the room where the judge is waiting and sit next to him, ready to translate. Neither the judge nor the lawyers say anything to us. I understand most of the English but little of what they are talking about. They laugh. Three minutes later Julio's lawyer walks us out of the room and explains that the percutaneous discectomy has been approved: the insurance company will pay for it. It is supposed to be good news—one of Julio's doctors has been asking for it for months. Julio does not look excited. He fears surgery and is convinced it will not work.

And what if it works? He may fear that even more. Once and again he mentions going back to work, once and again he complains about pain. Taxi driving is one idea he brings up often. “At least you can stop whenever you want, come back home and rest.” Now that he has all the papers he needs he does not know what to do. Like the people waiting at the WCB lobby, worn manila-paper envelopes sitting on their laps, Julio is injured, and tired. It may be that he has secretly decided not to work again. He cannot say it, and he waits; he waits for his chance to escape from the basket, like the rest of the crabs.

CHAPTER SIX:

NO TODO EN MI VIDA HA SIDO COLOR DE ROSA

[NOT EVERYTHING IN MY LIFE HAS BEEN ROSY]

It was at one of the meetings at the community organization in Queens. Perla was sitting next to Julio, and he introduced me to her. When the meeting was over our eyes met, she smiled and reached out to me—we were sitting four seats apart and most people had already stood up. “You know of anyone to practice English,” she asked, as if reading my mind—I was thinking of talking to her. “My English is not so great but if you want we can practice,” I said fast. “Really?” her eyes shone. We wrote down our phone numbers and planned to be in touch soon.

Two weeks later we met for the first time. She was from Quito and in her early 40s, brown curly hair, big smile, her skin darker than Julio’s. We met at the little square by the 52nd Street No. 7 train station in Woodside and sat outside—every few minutes the train thundered in and out of the station and made it difficult to talk. She told me she liked English but did not have anyone to practice with. She said that she woke up every morning at 5 am and went running before work. She laughed and added that she was watching her weight.

I came with an older man [señor] I worked with in Quito. He brought me here. He was coming to have surgery and I came as his nurse; I got the visa through him. He had told me that we’d stay for two months, and he’d pay me \$850 per month; I said, Wow, \$850 is excellent. But then I decided to stay. This was 2001, I came in June. So when it was time to go back I hid from this man [señor]. He kept my passport, all my papers, everything; he didn’t want me to stay. Until the last moment he insisted that I go back, and promised he’d bring me again; but that’s an opportunity you can’t miss,

there won't be another one. The family we stayed with—they supported me. And he went back by himself.

The second time we met outside the public library in Elmhurst. It was Saturday afternoon, the weather still warm. She told me she was writing a story in English—the main character was an immigrant named Margarita. She ripped off a sheet of paper from a small notebook and asked me to make corrections. “I’ve always liked writing,” she said. We talked for a while and then she invited me to her friend’s house around the corner. We spoke in English for half an hour and then I wrote down some words and expressions for her.

It's that I've always wanted to earn more. At that time my country dollarized [se dolarizó]. Most of us lost lots of things then [Los más perdimos muchas cosas ahí]; money at the banks and all that. Before coming here I had taken out a loan from the Mutual [la Mutualista] and bought a house for my mom, and I had to pay the monthly installments—\$400. The only way was to work hard, and what could be better than this opportunity. I wasn't going to miss it [No la iba a perder].

A little later her friend Rosi arrived with her boyfriend; they said hi and sat in the living room (we were at the dining table). The apartment was spacious and bright—the sixth floor in a coop building, big and colorful paintings on the walls. Perla made coffee and offered me fruit. Her only family in the United States was one of her brothers-in-law, and he was in California. In Quito were her mother and seven siblings. She seemed happy with the language notes, and said she would study them. Before I left she looked for her camera and had her friend take a picture of us.

I stayed with this family that helped me with the room, but they exploited me too. When I came home from work they waited for me with more work to do—I didn't go to bed before 11 or 12 at night. And then the toenails and also the weather—I suffered lots [yo sufrí mucho]. First it was food—it was bad for me and I had to go to the doctor. Second the problem I had in my leg—I had ingrown toenails [los uñeros] so I went to the doctor and he took them out; but he used too much anesthetic and that affected some tendon or nerve. Three weeks without working, and in pain and all that. Then came the weather, the cold; I had a flu that made me bleed for a month. By then I was already living alone—so I went through all this practically by myself.

As I went back home I read the story about Margarita: “She come back to NY and when she arrives at home every things disappear; somebody take your thinks and use credit card, your name, etc. Somebody think she was deported. She doesn't come more. I take your credit card and your name and go to the store and buy many things.” Is Margarita real? Is it a friend of hers? Perla has many friends but seems lonely; she is open and mysterious at once.

My first job was at a factory, I got it through a friend from Quito; she went back and left me her position. It was easy, just sticking labels onto clothes. I was there for two years, it was good. The thing is that the pay—you know, it's low. I wanted to earn more, I wanted to save. I was making \$720—imagine. \$400 I had to send home for the mortgage payments, \$250 rent—and then food, the subway card . . . I was left with nothing. That's how it was [Bueno, pasó]. At that time I went to study English at the Comité Civico Ecuatoriano, and only then did I start to meet people.

The third English practice was our last one. Perla was with another friend of hers, and they were very late (they were coming from work). We sat down at a coffee

shop and tried practicing some English, but her mind was somewhere else. She showed me pictures from a trip to Atlantic City she had made, and I was surprised to find Julio in them; I did not know they were close friends. I said something to Perla and she laughed, and then she and her friend laughed together. Then Perla decided to call him; he did not answer, though, and she complained. There was something going on and I did not know what it was.

I. ¡Es por amor! [It's for love!]

Perla had already called me two times before we talked. “Are you busy tomorrow?” she asked. Three weeks earlier I had seen her at the community organization Christmas party, the first time in several months; she had arrived with Julio and spent most of the time with him. “No, I’m not busy,” I replied, wondering what it maybe. “So I have a big favor to ask you—it’s something for Julio and me,” she smiled on the phone. “We are getting married tomorrow and need a witness.”

I can quote from my notes. *At 9 am I got to City Hall in Manhattan, thoughtfully dressed. I considered buying flowers but didn't. I took the old elevators upstairs and waited; there was no one around. A little later I ran into Perla's friend Rosi, the one I had seen at the apartment. She had not seen them, either. We talked for a while and then called Perla to make sure they were not waiting for us somewhere else. She didn't answer. They may still be in the subway, the friend said.*

The aisles were dark and empty, but the friend was familiar with the place; she had got married there not long ago. She was open and talkative so I asked her whether it had been for real or for papers—“I thought it was for real,” she smiled, “but I guess he didn't have the same idea.” My notes go on. *Julio and Perla showed up at 9:30 am. Both seemed happy—and amused. He wore an elegant blue suit, she wore a blazer and skirt. She had a bouquet of white flowers in her hands, and another white flower*

for Julio's buttonhole. We waited less than 5 minutes and were called in. They stood before the judge and she got them married in 2 minutes at the most. They had rings—she asked them to say “yes” and then she said that he could kiss her. I think they didn't understand when she said it—she was speaking fast—so they hesitated and didn't kiss.

*As a witness I had to show my ID and sign—I was delighted to be part of it. We walked out of the room and took pictures. We asked the judge to be in a picture with us—she agreed but looked unhappy. Julio and Perla didn't seem to care; they were in their own world. Somehow reading my mind, however, at some point Perla got close to me and whispered into my ear: *It's for love! [¡Es por amor!]* We slowly got out of the building, as if trying to make it last a bit longer. It wasn't that cold so we took more pictures outside. As the newlywed posed, the friend Rosi asked me whether Perla had told me about the problem she had. I said no and waited for her to tell me. If you're her friend she'll tell you sometime.*

What was Perla's problem? I tried to imagine and thought she may be sick or have some relative who was sick. Why did the friend mention it to me? We were uncertain about what to do. The friend said something about going for coffee, and Julio asked me if I knew any place around City Hall. I didn't so the friend said something about taking the train to 34th Street. I thought of the Italian cafes on McDougal Street and suggested that we get off the train at Bleecker. We walked there and had breakfast. The place was a bit dark but the music was nice—we stayed there for a while and Julio got the check.

Perla said that we were the only ones who knew about the wedding. She had not told anything yet to her family in Ecuador. She said that her mom would be happy, but then said she wasn't sure. She made a point of saying that this was her first wedding. Julio smiled and said that this was his first third wedding. He hadn't told his

brother and sister, either. They said that they had the idea of having a party sometime in the future, perhaps when the weather gets warm.

Around noon Perla had to leave for work. I was surprised she was working on her wedding day (she said that she hadn't brought a T-shirt to change into). The friend was working as well. Julio turned to me and said: And what do we do? Let's go to Queens, he said; we'll have lunch and talk for a while. We all took the train at West 4th. Perla and her friend were working in Brooklyn so they took the A downtown. Julio and I took the F and transferred to the Queens-bound No. 7 at 42nd Street.

I looked forward to talking to Julio. He had never mentioned his relationship with Perla, and we had spent much time together. We went to his place and then for lunch at Rincón Latino; for the first time we had beer with lunch—three beers each. We stayed until Perla was back from work and called Julio. It was already 4pm. It took time before we talked about the wedding. He insisted that they had been together for a while, so it was not a sudden decision. Soon we talked about arranged marriages. He said that after his own experience he had told himself that he would never marry someone without papers—because you can never be sure about the other person's feelings. Today I did it, he smiled.

Once the perpetrator, Julio has since then feared that the roles may change. We'd finished the third beer some half an hour ago and the restaurant was almost empty. I've done so many stupid things and have had such bad luck, he says. Maybe she'll say that she finally got herself a stupid one and that's it [se consiguió un estúpido], he whines. But then something changes: The third time lucky, he smiles, in reference to his two previous marriages. I hope this one will work out.

And then he said that they had plans. That the money situation was not so good right now, but they would recover. And he mentioned that he would like to go back to Ecuador and live in the country. Not far away from the city, but out in the country,

where you can have some land and grow vegetables, perhaps even have some animals. He had promised himself not to marry anyone without papers. But why not? *He said that the other day he didn't feel well and had no one to give him a glass of water.* Julio had papers but was sick. Perla was undocumented but could work and take care of him.

II. Collateral Arrest

Six months after the wedding, Perla had already mentioned something of what her friend Rosi had whispered into my ear as “Perla’s problem,” and I wanted to know more. I told Perla that I would like to tape-record her because I thought she was good at telling stories; she laughed. We met at the Starbucks on Queens Boulevard and 47th Street. Outside was hot, inside was cold. It was around 8 in the evening and she was coming from work.

So then I met this man, Freddy Campón, who studied English there too. I saw he was nice, cheerful, I liked him. At some point he had surgery done and I took care of him, and that's how our relationship started. And when I had to leave the room I was renting and was looking for another place—then he told me to move in with him. He already shared the place with someone, so it was the three of us. And that was fine, we got along very well. But you know, when you meet someone you say, well—you know about that person since the moment you meet him. The past is past, I didn't ask him anything. He was nice, cheerful, hard-working; he worked 7 days a week in painting and he was an artist too. I think that's what won my heart [me conquistó]. He sang really really well. I have a CD of his that he dedicated to me, sometime I'll have you listen to it. He sang at parties and all and had all the equipment—actually he was always borrowing it or renting it so I told him to make an effort and I would help him

buy it. That's why I tell you that no man has ever supported [mantenido] me—rather I've supported them. I had left the factory and was already working in cleaning—I worked six days, Tuesdays I was free but worked over the weekends. And that's the story up to that day. We shared the apartment for two years—exactly two years, in October I had moved in and in October this happened. [. . .]

October 6th, 2006, 6 in the morning—that's why I don't like the number six. It was Friday and I was getting ready to leave for work and they knocked on the door. Who is it? Open the door! No way was I going to imagine such a thing. I opened and six policemen came in. We're looking for Guillermo Campón. I said Guillermo Campón is he—but I've always known him as Freddy Campón. His stage name was Freddy, no one called him Guillermo. What's happening? Why? He came out of the room and they told us to put our hands up. Are you Guillermo? They handcuffed him. I asked them why, what happened, and then I learned that 10 years ago he had been deported—and now they were looking for everyone with an order of deportation. But I had never imagined—because he was married to an American citizen and had two American daughters, and he was doing the paperwork for his residency. So logically I said this man is good [un hombre bien], soon he'll have his papers; and we were making plans. They asked me for my papers and when I showed them my passport they handcuffed me too. They asked me what my relationship to him was—I told them he was my boyfriend. So wrong place and wrong time.

They took us out in different cars, handcuffed behind the back. I had already dressed up for work when they came but didn't have shoes on so I had to ask them to let me put shoes on. Everything else stayed there: my bag and some jewels I had in my bag, everything was left on the table, all my documents, papers, cards. I don't know where

they took us. There were offices and different rooms, and they made me go into one room, and him into another room. So we didn't have a chance to talk or anything; he couldn't explain it to me—nothing. They called me, they asked me questions. They saw my passport and said: Ah, you've entered with a Visa, you can get out today. They took my fingerprints and then took us to Federal Plaza, again separate cars. I tell you—we never got to be together again. They took pictures of me, criminal-like pictures, front, side, and then had me go into a room with two other women. Before leaving I'd managed to grab a sweater but at Federal Plaza they had me take it off. I had \$1 in my pocket and they took that too. They said I could leave in the afternoon and that I had the right to make one phone call—they never let me make that call, and no one knew I was there. It was already 7 pm, 8 pm, 9 pm, 10 pm. They brought us sandwiches, but I wasn't hungry—who can be hungry in that situation? It was already 10 pm and they brought mattresses for us to sleep. It was very cold—they only gave us a sheet for us to cover up with, we didn't sleep all night long.

Around 6 in the morning on Saturday they began taking us out—first the men, chained hands and feet and around the waist. And as I'm watching I see him walk by—chained like that. And then yes—I felt it's like a criminal. Then I did cry—seeing him like that. That was bad. Horrible. He's no criminal, why do they do that? All the men walked out that way. So from the window I tried to ask him: Where are they taking you? But he couldn't understand me. He was trying to tell me something, only with gestures, moving his face [con señas nomás] but I couldn't understand. Then I understood something clearly [clarito]: I love you, he told me, and then Bye. And that was the last time I've seen him up to this day. They called us by name and an officer came in with handcuffs. She starts handcuffing us around the waist and down to our feet—but why do you do that, I ask her, the hands are OK, but why the feet, we're not criminals,

we're nothing. That's the way we have to send you, she says. But where are you sending us? Then I cried. I cried seeing myself that way—never in my life had I thought I'd be handcuffed. The officer tells me: Calm down, calm down, there's no problem. But where are you taking us? And she tells me: To jail. Imagine. But I'm no criminal—why? So they start chaining us up—the other lady was an older woman, she also cried; the three of us cried seeing ourselves like that.

“Wrong place and wrong time,” Perla explains. In 2003 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) established the first Fugitive Operations Teams (FOTs) “to dramatically expand the agency’s efforts to locate, arrest, and remove fugitives from the United States.” A “fugitive,” according to ICE, is “an alien who has failed to leave the United States based upon a final order of removal, deportation, or exclusion.” Given the large number of “fugitive aliens” (more than 500,000 in 2008), the program gives priority to “cases involving aliens who pose a threat to national security and community safety, including members of transnational street gangs, child sex offenders, and aliens with prior convictions for violent crimes.”¹⁴⁰

When the program was launched in 2003, each FOT was expected to apprehend 125 fugitive aliens per year. Guidelines implemented in 2004 prioritized “dangerousness,” stating that at least 75% of the individuals apprehended had to be fugitive aliens with criminal convictions. In January 2006, as funding for the program rose steeply, the goal increased to 1000 individuals-year per team. But the revised benchmarks “apparently no longer require[d] either an absolute number or specific percentage of criminal aliens or fugitive aliens arrests.” Pressed to meet their goals, FOTs have increasingly filled the quota with “ordinary immigration status violators”

¹⁴⁰ The quotes and the number of fugitives come from the ICE website: http://www.ice.gov/pi/news/factsheets/NFOP_FS.htm [retrieved 09/09/10].

who—like Perla—happen to be in the residences or areas where FOTS conduct their operations.¹⁴¹

Perla insistently draws the boundary between her and criminals. “But I’m no criminal,” she repeats. Why is she treated as if she were dangerous? She had never thought she would be handcuffed or taken to jail—let alone shackled. Her emphasis on drawing the boundary is an instinctive reminder to the ICE officers that she is not among those whom the program was established to target. Perla is not familiar with how FOTs work and their guidelines—but she knows it makes no sense. Like 12,048 other immigrants in fiscal year 2007, Perla just happened to be in the wrong place and wrong time—one of 12,048 such “collateral arrests.”¹⁴²

When asked about her relationship to Freddy, she said he was her boyfriend, her voice cautious and defiant at once. Wrong place and wrong time, but the fugitive alien ICE was after was her boyfriend. Perla’s collateral arrest may be explained by an administrative quota, but it must also be something else. Perla weaves her romantic

¹⁴¹ The information and quotes are from Mendelson, Strom, and Wishnie 2009: 10. The authors add: “ICE has argued that FOT agents are sworn to uphold immigration laws and therefore obliged to arrest all violators. However, exercising discretion with respect to immigration apprehensions is well within ICE’s power—and necessary for the administration of safe, efficient, and sustainable operations. Indeed, FOTs are not designed, equipped, mandated, or funded to be general, roving enforcers of immigration law” (18).

¹⁴² The table below reports the number of apprehensions by priority for the fiscal year when Perla was arrested. The numbers show that 40% of those arrested by FOTs were status violators—not the immigrants the program was supposed to prioritize:

Apprehensions by Priority Category: Fiscal Year 2007 (October 2006 to September 2007)

	PRIORITY	ARRESTS	PERCENTAGE
1	Fugitives posing a threat to the nation	undisclosed	
2	Fugitives posing a threat to the community		
3	Fugitive aliens with a violent criminal history	2,677	9
4	Fugitives aliens with a criminal conviction		
5	Fugitives aliens with no criminal conviction	15,646	51
-	Ordinary status violators	12,084	40
	TOTAL	30,047	100

Source: Mendelson, Strom, and Wishnie 2009

threads through ICE's bureaucratic indifference. The ICE agents fill their quota; she follows Freddy, their fates are tied. Her arrest may be seen as an institutional blunder, but her memory crafts it differently: she reads his lips as he tells her "I love you" and bids her good bye.

They took us into a van and then had four other girls get in—there were seven of us in the van. So then again, I asked the officer who was there: And where are you taking us? You're going to be deported, she says, you're going back to your country. What? I say to myself: To my country? And like this? You can imagine how I was—I thought to myself: I'd rather go back to my country than go to jail—but going back like this, defeated. Not even well dressed, not even wearing socks. You can imagine—my hair all messed up [despeinada]. We all cried—the seven of us. I just couldn't believe it. But then I started seeing Newark airport, and thought Oh my God, it's true, they're sending me back.

When we got to Newark through the van metal grille I see lots of Immigration buses and other vans and men also chained up getting off onto the runway and walking into the plane. That's when I thought: They can't be all Ecuadorians! Then I stopped crying. When all the men were on board they made us get off the vans and took our handcuffs off. But they were just changing the handcuffs—as we got into the plane they handcuffed us hands and feet again. When I walked into the plane I saw it was mostly men, laughing, shouting, all that. There were about 20 women all in the front. The plane had a capacity of 280, and it was full, you can imagine—280 persons about to be deported, everyone chained up. Then someone came in and said that if we needed to have our consulate informed he could do that. I raised my hand and said: Look, no one knows about me, I haven't been able to talk to anyone since yesterday. Please, I tell him, I need to make a phone call, that's all I'm asking for. No, he said,

no phone calls now. Excuse me, I tell him before he goes, but where are you sending us? And then he said: Texas. Only then did I know we were going to Texas. Oh my God, I thought, in Texas by myself, what am I going to do? I asked to go to the bathroom, handcuffed and all—I wanted to see if he was in the plane; I thought at least the two of us can be together. But he wasn't there and I never heard from him again.

From the airport in Texas it was about 20 minutes in the van. First I could see the city, then it was only empty fields, and then I saw these big tents. Are they going to put us there? Is that a jail? As we walked in they had us take off all our clothes and they gave us a uniform—blue— and also underwear, sneakers, socks, bras, everything; our own clothes stayed there in baskets. They had us bathe and once we're clean [estamos bañaditas] they brought us lunch—and after two days I was hungry so I did eat my lunch. The blue uniform means we're immigrants, not felons [convictos]; their uniform is red. The jail is next to the tents, same place but separate [aparte]—I could see them from the patio. The camp was surrounded by metal grilles [rejas], barbwires [esos alambres] all around. There were about 50 women in each tent and five bathrooms, and also the dining area, and the beds—they were bunk beds, I was lucky to get the bottom one. In the tent where I was there was one African, one Chinese, one Honduran, and myself Ecuadorean. Everyone else was Salvadoran. They'd been caught coming in—that's when I learned about so many problems, the girls came and told me their stories, the things they'd gone through. They got there injured, their foot in a cast, they'd fallen when trying to run; one girl had got lots of prickles [espinos] in her legs, she'd been told to run because Immigration [la Migra] was around and she'd fallen into some thistle plant [una mata de espinos]. One story is different from

the other and all very painful [bien dolorosas]; I mean—what I went through is nothing compared to the stories I heard.

Only after 20 days was I able to talk to my brother-in-law in California. There was a phone, but you had to buy a card that was \$10, and I had no money. At some point I'm told I have an appointment with the judge over there—and now what do I do? I haven't been able to communicate, no one knows about me, and I've already got to see the judge. I was desperate and so one of the girls told me that she'd lend me five minutes from her card. I talked to my brother-in-law—where are you, he tells me, what's happened to you? The people in New York City had already called him. Call Rosi, I tell him, she's a good friend, she can help me. By then they had already set bond at \$10,000. If my family calls, I asked him, tell them I'm on vacation, I don't want to frighten them. But they had been calling my phone and the man at the apartment had been answering—and who knows how he broke the news that my family was desperate; he'd said the police have caught me and I'm in jail! They were asking what I've done to be in jail. Imagine their concern, their impotence not to be by my side knowing that I was here by myself. How my family learned about it, that's the pain I feel to this day. Had I had one phone call it would have been different, I would have told someone to call my family and explain that I'd been caught by Immigration and that's it. So in the end I told my brother-in-law to tell them the truth: that I was in Texas but not in jail. Because it's true: that was a camp, not a jail. The place was nice [eso era bonito], brand new [yo me fui a inaugurar]. They'd taken us there so as not to send us to regular jails.

And it wasn't strict or anything. The woman who was in charge came in and woke us up every morning at 6—we talked to her, joked around, there was no problem. At 6 we

woke up, made our beds, showered, and waited for breakfast—at 7 there was breakfast. At 10 we could go out to the patio, then come back in. We played, talked, there wasn't anything abnormal or anything bad. Some of the Salvadoran girls knew each other, some from the same neighborhood. They all wanted to see me dance—how people dance in Ecuador, they wanted to know and kept asking this or that. The Chinese one [la chinita] couldn't communicate because she didn't speak English, only Chinese. But the four of us who were not Salvadoran sat down to eat at the same table. I tried to talk to the Chinese, I even learned some Chinese from her, she taught me some words [palabritas]. I tried to help everyone. Maybe I'm not so talkative [no soy tanto de conversar] but I started teaching them English, and the girls were really into it—so I was the teacher [teacher] and in the month and twenty days I was there they learned words, the numbers, lots of things. Most of them had never been here so they knew nothing. I also spoke English with the guard and with the African one, although she also spoke Spanish very well; her native language was French but she spoke English and Spanish—she was trilingual. She and I spoke with the Chinese, we tried to communicate through signs [señas]. We tried to tell her to eat, because she didn't and was very thin—and one day she fainted and was taken to the ER. Her bond was \$40,000 and she was by herself, had one cousin in New York City who was helping her, but only on the phone. When she was called to court she had no lawyer, no interpreter, nothing. The African one was released two days before I got out; she also came to New York City. And the Honduran one was deported to her country. We all got along . . .

Why did it take twenty days for Perla to get in touch with her brother-in-law? Phones were not easily available, she explains. It is also possible that she needed time to recover; and she did not look forward to facing family and friends. The girls at the

camp looked up to her; food was little but she was not hungry (“You know how many pounds I lost? Almost 19 pounds—the body I had”); she took care of others; and she had the bottom bunk. After fearing deportation and jail, Perla’s account of camp life conveys bliss. Numbed by surprise and relief—she has not been deported and she is not in jail—Perla takes time to react.¹⁴³

Lawyers came there and so I contacted one. I told my brother-in-law to call him and pay him \$500 so he would take my case. I told him my case—but if you entered the country with a visa \$10,000 is too much, he said. I’ll get you out for the 10%. I had already had two court appointments inside, it was at the third one that he represented me. Some girls had already got out, also paying bond—the one who got the lowest was \$3000, \$4000, \$5000. For some it was up to \$20,000. They couldn’t pay. Deported. But they had them there long before sending them back; some more than 3 months. After I got out I talked on the phone to some of them—some had stayed until Christmas, some longer. Some had already come back and this time made it in. The judge was a good man, he spoke Spanish, a Hispanic judge. When I appeared before him he told me to say my name, my age, where I come from and all that. And when I told him my age he says: 44 years! I say yes. It doesn’t show, he tells me, you look 22. It’s not that I look 22, I say, I feel 22. And he laughed and made me laugh and that was nice. The lawyer told him that I had entered with a visa and that I was living in

¹⁴³ In February 2007 the *Washington Post* reported on the site where Perla had been held the previous year: “Ringed by barbed wire, a futuristic tent city rises from the Rio Grande Valley in the remote southern tip of Texas, the largest camp in a federal detention system rapidly gearing up to keep pace with Washington’s increasing demand for stronger enforcement of immigration laws . . . About 2,000 illegal immigrants, part of a record 26,500 held across the United States by federal authorities, will call the 10 giant tents home for weeks, months and perhaps years before they are removed from the United States and sent back to their home countries.” The article cites reports about the center: “Detainees are subject to penal system practices, such as group punishment for disciplinary infractions. The tents are windowless and the walls are blank, and no partitions or doors separate the five toilets, five sinks, five shower heads and eating areas. Lacking utensils on some days, detainees eat with their hands.” And it goes on: “Because lights are on around the clock, a visitor finds many occupants buried in their blankets throughout the day. The stillness and torpor of the pod’s communal room, where 50 to 60 people dwell, are noticeable” (Hsu and Moreno 2007).

New York City and asked that I be released with the 10% bond—\$1000. The judge said no—that's too little, she did overstay her visa, he said. She'll be out with \$2500. By then Rosi had already gotten \$4000 from her and other friends, so that was it. It'd been one month and twenty days.

The day I got out they gave me this sheet of paper where it says that I'm here legally—in case the police or anyone stops you. But they couldn't find my clothes—they stack everyone's clothes together in baskets, and they couldn't find mine. You know what it's like to walk out in that uniform? Six of us got out that day, I was the only one without her clothes. One of the girls was coming to New York City as well so we came together. From the camp they drove us to the town and dropped us off at a gas station. Good bye and good luck, they said. I had no money but had told my brother-in-law to be ready. He transferred me \$200 through Western Union from California. So I had the money—and then the other girl's dad had paid her lawyer to take her to the bus station. You can't go all the way to New York City dressed like that, the lawyer told me. If you have money we can stop by the mall so you buy some clothes. It was Friday. We got out the camp around 7 in the evening, went to the mall—I dumped the uniform at the mall. The bus left at 11:30 pm. It was about 36 hours on the bus—you can imagine how I was when I arrived. I came all the way with this girl; she had been caught at the border so she didn't know anything. We've been in touch; her bond was \$5000 but she didn't go back to the court. Without planning it I got to see Texas, San Antonio, Dallas, and the entire road to New York City. With the transfers and everything we arrived here on Monday around 4 am. I went to stay at my friend's, they were waiting for me and then other people came there to see me, maybe with a bottle of wine. You can't imagine what it was like.

III. Quería Nueva York y acá estoy [I wanted New York and here I am]

Like Margarita, the fictional character she told me about when I met her, Perla returned from detention to find that her belongings were gone. After she and Freddy were arrested and did not come back for several days, the third roommate assumed they had been deported. Soon rent was due and he could not pay the whole amount himself; he called Freddy's ex-wife to help him clear out the room and sublet it to someone else. They divided Perla's and Freddy's belonging between them, including Perla's documents and cards.

After an investigation the police arrested Freddy's ex wife on charges of grand larceny and identity theft, and she spent about 24 hours in jail. Seeking to recover some of her property, Perla took the case to Civil Court. One of her affidavits details the facts:

3. *The defendants took advantage of my unplanned absence from my apartment in October and November of 2006 to steal cash and personal property belonging to me, with an approximate value of more than \$10,000.00.*

4. *The items which they stole are the following:*

- a. My computer, a PC, worth approximately \$500.00;*
- b. A DVD player, worth approximately \$60.00;*
- c. My iPod, which I had bought only two weeks earlier for \$300.00;*
- d. A video recorder, worth approximately \$260.00;*
- e. A camera, worth approximately \$120.00;*
- f. All of my clothes and shoes, worth approximately \$800.00;*
- g. \$7,000.00 in cash, which I had hidden in my chest of drawers between items of clothing. This was all my savings over two years of work;*

h. A bag, which contained documents, jewelry, and cash. The documents in the bag included receipts, identification documents, credit cards, bank documents, hospital records, and my book of phone numbers and contacts. The jewelry included necklaces, bracelets, and rings, worth approximately \$1,500.00. I was in the process of selling some of my jewelry, and this bag contained receipts from those sales and \$400.00 from sales already made. The total value of the contents of the bag was approximately \$1,900.00.

5. I filed a criminal report on January 17, 2007 when I discovered that my Macy's credit card had an outstanding balance of approximately \$1,300.00. Approximately \$500.00 of this amount was for items I had purchased with the credit card before my detention, but the bill showed that my credit card had been used in November 2006, when I was in immigration detention. I immediately went to the police with the credit card bill and explained the situation. I also reported the theft of items from my apartment at this time.

Perla lost her boyfriend and everything she owned, including the clothes she was wearing the day of the arrest (only her ring, which the ICE agents could not take off, survived; it is a silver ring that she had made for herself back in Ecuador and wears to this day). The list of stolen items runs through several years of hard work and material accomplishment—the arrest sent her back to start.

The theft, however, would give her the opportunity to stay in the United States. Her first court date after transferring the case to New York City was in February 2007. The lawyer got an extension from February to May, and in the meantime Perla filed the case for theft and identity theft. When she appeared in May before the immigration

judge, Perla presented all the documents from the theft case and the judge granted her five more months—from May to October. She was already dating Julio .

Before something else happens between us I have to tell you about the problem I have, I told him. This was in September and my court date was in October. This is going to determine whether we stay together or not. You decide. I told him about my problem: you know what, in October I have a deportation hearing. Oh my God, he said, oh my God. Why didn't you tell me from the beginning? Now I'm already attached to you [encariñado contigo], he said. If I had told you at the beginning, I told him, I didn't know you, I don't know how you'd have taken it—but that's why I'm telling you now: before we go on. So you decide if you want us to stay together, in case you care for me a little bit [si me quieres un poquito]—but now you know the problem I have; or we just stay as friends—nothing has happened and that's it. He was left thinking and then said that something must be done—because I'd already entered his heart [porque ya entré en su corazoncito] so he'd be sad if I had to go back.

In October Perla appeared before the immigration judge, and because her other case was moving slowly, she managed to get another extension. A last court date was set for February 2008—it seemed to be the end. Her lawyer asked her if she had a boyfriend. “Yes, I told him. But at that moment I wasn't thinking whether Julio was a citizen or anything like that.” Your only chance is marrying a citizen, the lawyer said. “My boyfriend is a citizen, but I've just told him about my problem, I don't know if he'll accept this.” Sit down and talk to him, the lawyer suggested: “If he cares for you and has good will he may help you.”

We just kept dating, October went by, November went by, December went by—it was December when he told me: Set a date for marriage. I had not told him anything so he

wouldn't say I was putting pressure on him; you know, sometimes they say that it's because of the papers. I didn't want any pressure or anything. If it comes from him, I said OK, excellent. But I didn't say anything myself. He knew the situation I was in and yet he kept going out with me, and we had already shared several things, I had met his children, all that; he was already getting to know me. Well, I told him, until next year, because next year I'm going back to my country. No, he said, your court date is in February, you still have chances: Set a date for my marriage. I asked him if he was sure. He said yes. I asked him why he was doing it. Two reasons, he said. Because I want to help you and because I care for you [te quiero]—I don't want you to leave, so if this is the solution, let's do it. That's why everything was so fast—we had only one month, imagine. But I'm telling you: Our marriage is legal because we care for each other [nos queremos], it wasn't something out of the blue [no fue una cosa de momento], we were already together.

There are still some loose threads, but Perla is well on the path to regularizing her legal situation in the United States. Her case has taken her through different areas of law. The theft—and particularly the identity theft, the easiest one to prove—ended up giving her the time to find her way out of an almost impossible situation. Initially the “illegal” one, Perla became the victim of crime and sided with the law to pursue another “illegal”—this time an American citizen who had stolen from her. First persecuted for not having “papers,” Perla switched roles and sided with the law to persecute those who had stolen the “papers” that she did have. Perla's experience turned the system inside out, at least for several months.

Perla's list of stolen items portrays her life in New York City up to the arrest. She worked hard and she spent money—computer, DVD player, iPod, and more. Neither work nor consumption gave her the right to be here, though. When the ICE

agents ask for her documents, she is expected to show her Ecuadorian passport and her expired visa, not her Macy's credit card. Perla came to the United States looking for independence: no man has ever supported me, she says. Perla came to the United States to make money; by working and spending, she became part of Macy's, and part of New York City. That is not how immigration law approaches it. Marriage, not independence, was her only option to stay in the United States.¹⁴⁴

After getting his own papers through marriage, Julio promised not to help anyone the way he had been helped. Too much confusion, he thought; too much uncertainty. This time he saw no alternative—he knew it was all or nothing. The years after his back accident at the clinic have been rough; his body is not the same and money has been scarce. He could not afford to keep his promise—after more than 15 years of immigrant life, his legal status was all he had. Perla told me about the conversation they had:

Only one thing I'll ask you, he said. I can't offer you anything because this problem in my back, you know, I'm not working—I can't offer you anything. But I want you to promise me that this marriage is going to be forever [para toda la vida]. I don't want you to tell me: No, that's it, I'm getting divorced. That's not what I want, I told him. I want it to be forever. I promise it. The two of us will make it together. I'll help you

¹⁴⁴ In 2008, the year Perla married Julio and applied for legal residency, 24% of all people obtaining legal permanent residency (1,107,126) were spouses of a US citizen; the percentage was higher (29.9%) for those adjusting their status from within the United States (DHS 2009: Table 6). 39% of men and 49% of women were granted legal permanent residency as immediate relatives of US citizens (DHS 2009: Table 9).

Legal Permanent Residency by Class of Admission: Fiscal Year 2008

ADMISSION CATEGORY	Family-sponsored preferences	Employment-based preferences	Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens	Diversity	Refugees and asylees	Other
Ecuador	25.5%	13.7%	57.9%	0.8%	1.5%	0.5%
Total	4.8%	27.4%	42.4%	1.3%	23.7%	0.3%

Source: DHS 2009: Table 10

with your problem as well so you get better [que salgas tu de esto]. You're helping me too—we'll support each other. And here we are [Y ahí estamos].

One man got her in trouble, another man saved her. Towards the end of our first interview at Starbucks, Perla sums up the story: “Not so good and not so bad. I wanted New York and here I am.”

IV. Una maestra como yo [A teacher like me]

Since I was 17 my dream was always to come here to the United States. I applied for a visa at the embassy, you know; they never gave it to me. I went to the Mexican embassy and got a tourist visa for three months. So I thought about that—because friends had come before and entered via Mexico and it had been easy. But one friend got caught and was in jail for six months, and I changed my mind. Then I lost the visa, gave up coming, and thought maybe someday I'll make it in, but with a visa.

We're sitting at Starbucks, again. One of her friends inspired her wish, and the problems he had stopped her from coming. But this boy had “bad and good luck.” When he tried to cross the border he got caught and they had him in jail for months; but “as he was detained he fell in love with the one of the policeman's daughter, and she fell in love with him too—they got married so she helped him.” This boy's story is Perla's own story: bad and good luck go together, and so do migration and love.

After ten years abroad the friend came to visit for the first time. It was the late 1980s, Perla was about 26, the friend was about 30. He was living in Chicago with his policeman's daughter wife and had two children by then. Everyone was expecting him. “And you know what? He came back shorter than I remembered him, and he used to be thin and came back fat.” The friend's visit was strange. “We talked and

learned about his life, and then we never saw him again nor heard anything else from him.”

I’ve always lived with my mom. A dad I don’t have, he had another family. We were nine siblings living with my mom. He would come to see us every now and then, but financially never helped. My mom ran her business—she catered for the workers at a factory. So thank God food we always had. She could send us to school up to the third year of high school. And then we studied at night and paid for it ourselves—my mom couldn’t send everyone to school. I helped her at the factory too; we got up together at 5 in the morning to cook for 200 workers—imagine that was hard [tremendo]. My mom worked there for 15 years until she got sick. From then on each one saw to their own life [Ahí cada cual ya vio su vida]. My other siblings grew up, they married, the only one who didn’t is me [la única que no soy yo].

Perla was the first among her siblings to go abroad (one brother-in-law was already in California, and one brother is now in Spain). I ask her if she is the most adventurous in the family. “Yes,” she does not doubt. “I’ll be honest—I know it’s not good that I say it—but I’m the one who has taken care of everyone [la que ha visto por todos] and maybe that’s why I didn’t get married before and haven’t wanted to have children—first family and then myself. I always said at least I have to give my mom a house.”

At 23 Perla managed to start college at the Universidad Central del Ecuador, the oldest university in the country. “When I was in high school I wanted to study chemistry, pharmacy, or nursing; but I couldn’t because the classes were in the morning and it was expensive [costoso]. I changed to philosophy so I could work during the day and study at night.” Her jobs included tourist guide, factory worker, and clothes saleswoman. Perla would not study philosophy for long, though. “To be

honest I really liked English, so I chose to study English. I actually graduated in English and French.” She had never told me that; I am surprised and she notices. “I feel embarrassed to tell people I’m a language teacher because I don’t know anything,” she laughs.

I graduated, I have the basics, I studied the structure, linguistics, all you need to study to graduate, five years at the university. It’s a bachelor’s degree [licenciatura] that I have so I can teach high school. It was very difficult [me costó mucho] and in the end I had to leave the jobs I had so I could finish my studies. The first two semesters they teach us to teach, not so much the language. We start with the verb to be, past, present, future, and then all the grammar, how to form sentences. They teach us the phonemes—I remember very well the table they gave us, the tongue, the tongue’s shape, the lips, all that. I remember and that’s the way we can pronounce. When I speak English I pronounce it well—my problem is speaking [lo que me falta es hablar]. But I like pronouncing well.

English gave me the chance to meet Perla; she was looking for someone to practice conversation with. Struggling with English has been central to her immigrant experience. It was while learning English that she met Freddy and other friends. It was in teaching English that she found her role at the Texas detention camp. And in the meantime she has taken lots of classes and keeps planning to take more. But she had never mentioned that back in Quito she had graduated from college as an English teacher.

It is a commonplace to say that Spanish-speaking immigrants in the United States do not learn English, even after many years living in the country. Perla’s case suggests that some of them actually forget the English they knew before coming. Back at the Universidad Central the focus was on structure, linguistics, and methodology;

not so much on speech. Now that she has lived in New York City for almost eight years she can still remember some of that—but she cannot yet speak the language.

*After college I taught at a high school for three years, a convent school. I had six classes, always teaching English. Before that I had spent one year doing my practice teaching, one year teaching fifth year physics and math. I really liked teaching. You know I was, according to the girls at the convent school, the best teacher they'd ever had. On Teacher's Day all my students put together an event for me, they brought musicians, everyone gave me a present.*¹⁴⁵

The students told me that they had never had a teacher like me [una mestra como yo]—because my method was this: not being their teacher but their partner [compañera del curso]. That's when they like the class better—not when they get yelled at or have something imposed. There's nothing you can impose on a student—you have to win her over with pedagogy [sino que se le consigue con dinámica]. I didn't follow the textbook. Or maybe I did the textbook for half the class and the other half I did something else.

One time the principal summoned me because over break one of the students came up to me and told me, Hey, Perlita, what's up? The principal overheard and then told me to make sure students were respectful—they should call me Licenciada Manzano; I should not give them so much confidence. But I told her that was exactly the point—to give them confidence so they are not scared of the class. I'm not their teacher, I'm their classmate—and thus we get along better. You can't tell the student to rise up to where you are; you have to come down to where they are—that you can do.

¹⁴⁵ Teacher's Day in Ecuador is April 13th, the birthday of Juan Montalvo (1832, Ambato–1889, Paris), an Ecuadorian author, who wrote a sequel to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, among many other books.

Perla remembers joyfully. The high-school girls liked her. The contrast between her public university training (emphasizing innovative teaching methodology) and the traditional and rigid convent school doctrine is clear; she stood out among the teachers and the students acknowledged her warmly. As much as she liked the job, however, the money was too little. She had opportunities to work in other schools, but never more than two or three hours per week. Two of her older brothers owned a jewelry shop, and she was already helping them. But working at the school did not let her travel; traveling was where the money was, so she quit her teaching job.

I went out around all the provinces for maybe a month and took requests. Then I came back with the orders—say some 20,000 badges [escarapelas] for my brothers to make. They worked on them and once they were ready we mailed them and only then came the payment—they deposited it in my account. My brother gave me perhaps 50 cents per badge—I sold them at \$1 so 50 cents were for me. Sometimes it was more money, sometimes less; sometimes I helped my brothers in the workshop. And I spent years working with them, travelling to the provinces. I visited schools, city halls [alcaldías], health centers, sports clubs [clubes deportivos], organizations [instituciones]. I brought samples so customers chose what they needed. We made badges, pins, trophies, medals, awards, plaques, trophies.

Perla's job took her through the Ecuadorian social fabric; the products she sold were tokens of community life. A sports club in some town was organizing a local soccer tournament; they needed trophies. A nurse was retiring after decades of work; they needed a plaque. A school was awarding its best student; they needed something—inexpensive yet meaningful, massive yet personal—to mark the occasion. Perla's and her brother's business provided small-town social occasions with

mementos to celebrate themselves, to physically inscribe meaning; their little pieces of quickly assembled metal kept special memories against the passing of time. One of her business trips took her to Azogues.

It was a job for the National Union of Teachers [UNE]. They had asked for it almost overnight, they needed some rings for an award ceremony and they had forgotten to order them. They insisted, asked me to do it as a favor. I talked to my brothers and they said they could work all night long and have it ready for the next day, and told me that I should charge them well, because it was an urgent job. I called back and said that tomorrow at 5 in the evening I would be there with the rings, right before the ceremony. I worked all night long with my brothers, and at 6 am I took the bus—it's 8 hours from Quito to Azogues. The ceremony was at 6 pm and I got there 5:30. I looked for the UNE's president, and saw that everyone was dressed up formally [todos vestidos de señores]. Some people knew me so they asked, Licenciada Manzano, what are you doing here? I was wearing blue jeans and a T-shirt; my plan was to deliver the work, get paid, and then back to Quito. Then I saw the president, Miss Manzano, thank you very much. last minute we realized we had to give out the rings for some people reaching 25 years on the job; wait for me maybe some 30 minutes until I'm free [me desocupo] and then I'll pay you [le cancelo]. In the meantime people were dancing, they offered me something to drink, no, thank you very much, maybe some soda [una sodita]. It was already 7 pm and I thought this is going to take longer, and I won't get the money. I looked for the president and told him, I have to go back to Quito. But wait a little more, there's transportation until midnight. Let me dance this piece [pieza] with you. No, I tell him, I'm ashamed, look how everyone's dressed and I'm wearing blue jeans. Don't worry, he tells me, and he asks me to dance.

And as we are dancing the president tells me: You know what, there's someone who wants to meet you. Come with me, I'll introduce you. And all the way in the back there were three men, very well dressed, as the occasion prescribed. So I look at them as we walked in and thought it must be the one on the left. Said and done: as we walked toward them he was smiling. How do you do, how do you do, and he took my hand and told me: It's a pleasure to meet you. And it was love at first sight [un flechazo], such chemistry between the two of us. I spent more than an hour dancing with him and as we danced he asked me questions and I asked him too. But I have to go back to Quito, I told him, and he said that I should wait, he could take me to the bus terminal. But I still needed for the president [licenciado] to pay me—maybe around 9 pm he finally gave me the check. And then this man took me to the bus station, I wouldn't want to lose contact with you, he said. I gave him my phone number, and next day 8 in the morning he was calling me on the phone. How was the trip, he said, and this and that, and that next month he would be in Quito and wanted to see me. And so it was that our relationship started, although it was a long distance. When I traveled to Azogues or Cuenca we saw each other, and then he traveled to Quito. It was maybe eight times a year that we saw each other—about two years went by, and once when I traveled there he introduced me to his brother, mom and two children he had, one boy and one girl.

Pause for one second and picture her. She has worked all night and rode the bus all day to deliver the product on time. The UNE's president asks her to wait for him to pay her. She sits down by herself. Everyone is dressed up and they all know each other. She has to wait and does not know what to do; she feels uncomfortable and out of place. Her merchandise runs through tightly-knit social connections; she herself remains an outsider. One time she was a teacher herself; now she is surrounded by teachers and she is a stranger. But this trip is different; she remembers every detail.

The president may have drunk a bit and forces her to dance. And he introduces her to someone who wants to meet her. She knows who he is before meeting him; he is smiling.

I asked him about his children's mom and he said I'm a single dad. But your children must have a mom. He said that he didn't want to talk about that. I never asked him again. We'd been together for two years and everything was going well [una relación bonita]; and then he suddenly changed. He stopped calling me often; when I called I was told he wasn't there. I said this is getting bad, something is going on. I travelled to Azogues to ask him what happened—only then did he tell me the truth. His children's mom, she had abandoned him four months before I met him; she had gone to Spain and left him and the children behind. She didn't even ask him, she made the decision suddenly and left, and for two years he heard nothing from her. And now she was back in Azogues looking for him and the children. But you told me you were a single dad. He said he'd lied to me. Well, I told him, I am single, I can get any boyfriends I want, but you're not—you're married and your wife is back. Don't worry about me. It was a good time [Fue un tiempo bonito] but now it's over. No, he said, I really care about you, I'm going to get divorced. OK, I said, once I see the certificate of divorce we'll continue, not before. It's not the same, I told him.

In 1999—one year before Perla left for New York City—Ecuador went through its worst financial crisis in history. “It was chaos,” she remembers. Ecuador’s national currency (sucre) plunged. Perla’s savings at Banco El Progreso—one of the first to collapse—shrank from approximately \$5000 in 1997 (\$ 20 million sucres) to

\$800 in 2000, when the economy dollarized.¹⁴⁶ And that same year Perla's brothers' jewelry store was robbed. "My brothers lost everything, imagine. And to set up a jewelry workshop again—that's impossible and they were in debt. We had all bought together a 2000 square meter lot and we had to give it to the bank."

"It was all at the same time, my brother's loss and the problem with the Banks [la condonación de los depósitos]." Perla's brother, the eldest one, was shocked. "I told him, look, you're not going to die—money is only money, don't let yourself down." The savings' vanishing and the workshop's burglary were unconnected, and at the same time they were not: the entire country was shattered by economic and political crisis. These sudden blows, moreover, expressed or announced more pervasive trends. The family business was too old-fashioned, too dependent on social relationships and a sort of community life that were now on decline. "My brothers still have their workshop but it's much smaller . Sometimes it's three months without any work."

Good and bad things go together. "Not everything got lost because just then luck was on my side and soon I was given the visa and could come here and help get my siblings back on track." Perla was still in touch with her boyfriend, though it had not been the same. "Until one day he told me that he had started the paperwork for divorce and asked me to wait for him." But it was then that she ran across the

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Perla's Savings in the Bank: 1997-2000			
Year	Exchange Rate	Sucres	Dollars
1997	3998.35	\$20,000,000	\$5,002.06
1998	5438.50	\$20,000,000	\$3,677.48
1999	11803.30	\$20,000,000	\$1,694.44
2000	25000.00	\$20,000,000	\$800.00

Source: Acosta [1995] 2001: 356

opportunity to travel. “I told him not to worry, to go on with his life that I would go on with mine, and that I’m going on a long trip. I’m going to the United States, I told him. And he didn’t believe me.”

By then my passport was already stamped. I said no—this is my opportunity to leave for the United States. I called him to say good bye, and he told me I was crazy: Why are you leaving? You’re lying to me. Wait for me, next week I’ll be in Quito. I was travelling on Sunday, I called him on Thursday. And the next Thursday—my first week here—he actually traveled to Quito with the certificate of divorce; he showed it to my cousin and my cousin told me. From him I never heard again. I didn’t even bring a picture with me. What for? I left everything there—I suffered once, not again. Now I’ll get myself a gringo, I said.

“Not everything in my life has been rosy,” says Perla. I am surprised because I have never thought so. I can tell there is some survivor’s euphoria in her voice. Not long ago she was about to be deported; now she is waiting for her green card. “But at least I’ve tried to behave properly [llevar una vida sana]; to accomplish what I always wanted—to study and get my degree [estudiar y sacar un título]; to work and help my family, and my mom.”

V. Círculo de un Mundo Opuesto [Circle of an Opposite World]

After getting handcuffed and flown across the country as if she were some kind of dangerous criminal, Perla has come back to her job: “Imagine cleaning bathrooms, sometimes three or four bathrooms every day.” And cleaning itself is not as bad as dealing with her bosses: she tells me about the lady she works for on Tuesdays and Fridays who yelled at her because she used Windex to clean the piano. The contrast between her detention—the movie-like knocking on the door, the separate cars, the

shackled immigrants on the flight to Texas, the fellow prisoners at the camp—and her daily job reveals something about immigrant life: so spectacular and ordinary at once.

Perla insists on overcoming the obstacles and moving forward. “I tell Julio that faith moves mountains, and he tells me not to have that much faith lest the mountains fall upon us.” Her optimism is the survivor’s one: new documents, new life. Julio may have felt that way when getting his own papers, but that was long ago. “My hope [ilusión] now is to have my own business,” she says. “I’m ready.”

I ask her if she would like to go back to Ecuador. “Yes—but with money; going back just for going back—no.” Would she work again in the family jewelry business? “If I go back I want to learn to speak English well, so I can be an interpreter or I can use my degree to teach—I’ve got my degree hanging on the wall, how many years now?” English was an important part of Perla’s life in Ecuador, and she would like it to be an important part when she goes back. In New York City, however, after eight years, English remains elusive: “I’m telling you my plan is to devote at least two hours every Saturday. I was going to the NY Language Center and was doing well; but then all this happened and my brain sort of shut down.”

Back home it was always “Family first—then myself.” After helping her mother cook for the factory workers, Perla managed to finish high school and then go on to the university. After graduation she taught English for three years. But her teaching job did not pay enough, and sooner rather than later Perla quit the school to work with her brothers. Tension between helping the family and forging her own path runs through her life in Ecuador; her aspiration to progress clashing with her family needs. She gave up the teaching and went back to working with her brothers, but she became an itinerant saleswoman: a family member and restless stranger all at once.

When the 1999 financial crisis and the burglary of the jewelry shop hit the family, Perla had her chance. The mortgage they had taken out to buy their mother’s

house was now in jeopardy; something had to be done. She found an opportunity to travel and had no doubt. New York City was an adventure that could be afforded—an adventure that promised to pay for itself. When I ask her whether she is the most adventurous one among her siblings, she says yes, and quickly adds that “I’m the most caring one.” In Ecuador she was divided between family and self; in New York City adventure and care could be combined. When arrested and sent to Texas, Perla’s main concern was how much she would make her family suffer: she migrated to help her family, now she was causing them pain. Immigrant Perla can combine self and family, distance and care, future and past.

Marriage is one of the few vehicles immigrants have to regularize their status in the United States. A sort of strangely engineered mechanism, immigration law first forces migrants to leave their family ties behind, and then pushes them to form new family ties. Perla left her family and last boyfriend for independence in New York City. If she wants to stay in New York City, however, she must depend on another man. The city of the lonely must also be the city of love.

It was when travelling around the country as a saleswoman that I began writing. I liked it because I didn’t have much to do. I would stay at hotels, and at night I couldn’t sleep, so I wrote: stories, poetry and also songs. It must be all saved in Quito, my writings [mis escrituras]. And here too, the first years I began writing the book I’m telling you about. And my dream was to meet some moviemaker and give him my writings to see what he thinks.

Before getting arrested Perla was writing a novel that went missing with the rest of her things. Unlike the story about Margarita she showed me when I first met her, “Circle of an Opposing World [Círculo de un Mundo Opuesto]”—the stolen manuscript—was not autobiographical; it was about a young girl from a well-off

family who meets and falls in love with an older, married man, and suffers because of that. The title implies some sort of double negative, perhaps for emphasis, perhaps suggesting that the negative forces will somehow counterbalance each other. Her narrative style looks for sudden turns of events, obstacles and circles around the obstacles, thunders of doom and lucky strikes.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
YO QUERIA SER COMO DECIR MODERNA
[I WANTED TO BE, AS THEY SAY, MODERN]

In 2007 Julio invited me to spend Christmas with them for the first time. (I already knew Perla but they had not married yet.) We were at an end-of-the-year party at the community organization where we had met, and I asked him what he was doing for Christmas. He said he would spend it at home with his family and children, and after pausing for three or four seconds he asked me if I wanted to spend it with them. “I can promise no party,” he told me, “but we can eat something and drink some wine among friends.” That was the night I met Julio’s sister, Daniela. I can quote from my notes:

There was shrimp ceviche that Daniela made, and three aluminum foil pans: rice with beans [gandules], beet salad, and roasted pork ribs [hornado]. After we ate there was dancing: two women—Perla and Daniela—and four men—Julio, Saúl, Saúl’s coworker Manuel, and me—so we took turns. I was embarrassed, the room was small and bright. Then came the time to tell jokes. Perla pushed me to tell one, and I couldn’t. Then Daniela said to Saúl and Manuel: Why don’t you guys make some music? They played the guitar for hours, with some interruptions for dancing and conversation. They didn’t sing much, but they had the rest did, particularly Julio. Daniela helped with the lyrics and asked for specific songs. Both Julio and Daniela said that their favorite song was “El Chinchinal.” After we were done with the presents there was some more music and dancing, and soon after the guitar playing resumed, and we kept drinking wine. Then we had coffee or tea with panettone and around 5 am Daniela started to make some chicken broth that she said was good for hangover. I talked to her in the kitchen as she made the soup. A little before 7 am I

decided to leave. I thanked Julio for everything, and he apologized for not having offered something better. I insisted that all had been very nice.

The next day I woke up very late, looked up “El Chinchinal” on the internet, and learned that it was about lonely internal migrants working at the construction of the Ibarra-San Lorenzo railroad. The night had unfolded methodically; I did not know it so I was anxious, but everyone seemed to be following a plan. I particularly remembered Daniela and the conversation in the kitchen as she made the soup. In Ecuador she was a high school math teacher, and here she lives on Long Island, where she takes care of children; she talked mostly about one of them. She also made a point of saying that she does not interact much with her brothers, even if she visits them most Sundays. “We’re all quite autonomous,” she said.

I had looked forward to meeting Daniela since Julio mentioned her for the first time. He had lent her the money to travel here from Ecuador; then he had found someone for her to marry, but she had said no. After Christmas I tried to talk to her again but did not find the occasion; she was not in Queens much. I met her again several months later at Julio’s and Perla’s wedding party, and soon after she stayed with them for one week. Julio had traveled to Ecuador so it was easy to talk. Then I met with her one more time, and then another one right before leaving Queens. All in all I had three long conversations with her, all in the kitchen of Julio’s apartment.

This chapter is based on the material I collected in these three meetings. I begin by presenting fragments of Daniela’s account with no interruptions. I transcribed, edited, and translated the recordings, but for the most part I just have her talk. Echoing the third volume of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, I title this section “life-record” of an immigrant.¹⁴⁷ The two following sections are also

¹⁴⁷ The fragments presented here depart from Daniela’s original account. I have made the text shorter by keeping it to the moments or situations she seemed to emphasize the most. I have edited out most of the false starts, interruptions, and repetitions frequent in spoken language. The translation from Spanish into English has also made this version more linear than the original, as I could not convey her very

based on Daniela's testimony, but I take more distance from her voice—I interrupt her more. Section II zooms in on Daniela's decision to leave Ecuador and her non-decision to return. Section III is an attempt at drawing the broader picture of her life and interpreting her emigrant trajectory as part of it.

I. Life-Record of an Immigrant

When I took developmental psychology in college I realized that I've been a rebel without a cause since I was in my mother's womb. And the reason is this. My mom had already had four boys, and when she's pregnant with me my dad touches her belly and tells her: May God make this one a girl—so she can cook. He didn't say for her to be the house's little princess; he said so she can cook.

Salir [To Leave]

The story of my father is kind of spectacular. His father dies when he's six and my grandmother marries an older man; she was 26 and had four children. My father says that when he's nine his stepfather takes him out of school and forces him to work. My grandmother soon gets pregnant with twins and decides to split her children up: some with her mother, one with her sister, another one with another sister. And because my dad was old enough to work and doesn't get sent anywhere, he runs away from the house. At nine he runs away. Back then going to the Oriente was like going to the United States now. There were no roads, there was nothing; only tracks left behind by the people themselves, the people looking for better days. He says that the Oriente was the option that was available for anyone who wanted to leave. You could get out there and take as much land as you wanted. He runs away with a friend of the family. And that part of the story I don't know well, what he did, what happened: he tells me the

specific choices of words and turns of phrases in English. Additionally, I have ordered the material chronologically, which is not how she presented it to me. And finally, my own voice is now absent: a more literal transcription would have looked like an interview, not a monologue, and a rather untidy one.

story since he's 14—from nine to 14 I don't know what happened. At 14 he worked milling sugar cane, and was in charge of distilling liquor, always in the Oriente; he never heard from his parents, and he never went back. At 19 he does go back to see his mom, but he has an idea of vengeance. My grandmother now had eight children, four from her first husband and four from the other man. And when he arrives my granny was about to deliver, and she was sick, and before giving birth she got sicker, and they didn't have time to take her to the hospital. And in those final days she asks him not to hurt her children's father. Because that's the idea he had. She asks him to forgive her for not having fought for him. And eight days after he arrived she dies. Her daughter was born but she died.

Three years later my dad marries my mom, they have a child, and he starts saying that it's time to work, it's time to leave. I know he's been to the Oriente, the coast, he's been everywhere, the highlands in the time of the train, when he was young. He's been to places that not even his children have been to. He'd come back every 8 or 10 months; and every time he was back he would leave my mom pregnant and again he would go; as if to make sure that the woman stayed there. We grew up almost only with my mom, and we kept waiting, keeping track of the months, when will he come? And my mom would pile up our misdeeds—your dad is coming soon and you'll see. So maybe one month before he came back we'd start behaving better. And of course he's the one who got all the credit, in spite of my mom's work; she was the mean one, the one who punished us and didn't understand us. He got back to see the good things: the children are fine, they're doing very well in school, good students, one or two fights with the neighbors, nothing to worry about. That's one of the reasons why my brothers left the house too—if dad isn't there, they will leave too. Saúl stayed longer, I think he left when he was 17. But Julio left very young, and, actually, he left when my father

was at home. There was much poverty, much need, my dad mostly wasn't around, my mom—it's not that we didn't have anything to eat, it's more that you could see the things you didn't have. So that's why my male siblings say, no, why—if I can, if dad never gives us anything . . .

But, you know, it's precisely when my brother Julio leaves that our economic situation improves. I don't know how, I guess somehow my parents were saving money: suddenly they were much better off. They acquired some properties, I don't know if the money was borrowed or their own, but all of a sudden we're prosperous. My brother who's in Spain starts working with Saúl, and by the time Julio leaves poverty is gone. All of us helped, we went to school, we were good students, always the best students; poverty was not an excuse, we always got the best grades. And the rule in my house was that each sibling helped the next one, checked up on their homework, made sure they were doing fine. We all learned to read and write from our siblings before going to school, and we knew the alphabet, and how to write our name, everything—everyone the same, all the way to my youngest sister. Not that because we were poor or we didn't have shoes—there always were congratulations for my mom. They told her that God gives hats to those with no head: good students and it was obvious that we were going to stay behind. [. . .]

My last year of school was bad. My parents start giving me lots of chores in the house, they punish me with lots of chores. They wanted me to get tired of school and drop out. I finished the sixth grade with very bad grades, and then my dad tells me the plan: that he'll take me to the city of Milagro on the coast, that's where he had his house, his life. There I'll study dressmaking, I'll have to wake up at 5 in the morning, I'll have cook for five people, this and that. Oh no. No sir. Am I going to be your slave?

No. I stay here with my mom. No. No. No. Most of my older brothers, for better or worse, were working on the coast. My dad gets really mad: You don't want to study, OK, you stay here, you go nowhere. When will I turn 18 and be able to do whatever I want? That's what I asked myself. I stay with my mom, and I feel very sorry for her, all those years struggling with the boys, the work at home. And I'm already 12 so I can help, I can be useful. And they already wanted to take me away? No. And to be their slave? No. My brother who's now in Spain begged me to go, here you'll study, here we'll give you everything. No. I don't want anything. So it's at 12 that I start fighting back. I think it was time to start saying no.

I stay there until I'm about to turn 18 and then I tell my dad: That's it. I haven't studied so far but now it's my turn. Then you have to work, he says. But if I've worked all my life, what do you think I've been doing here? I just don't want to leave like my brothers, at night. Just give me your permission. My mom, my younger siblings cried; we got along, we played together. But I was thinking about my mom's life, and it was no life: she has eight children, she's their children's slave, she never has time for herself. I said no—the same is going to happen to me. Screw marriage! And my cousins in the Oriente—I always went there on vacation; they all worked hard when they were little, but at 18 they all started studying, and I would tell myself, Daniela, why would one want to waste oneself in that way when there's so much to do? That's when I start thinking, and when I talk to my dad. My brothers didn't want me to study, they were furious with me: they said that I should marry, that women don't need to study. My dad says OK, but you'll have to work to support yourself. Don't expect anything from me. And that's all I wanted him to say.

There was a woman who had promised to help me if I wanted to study, and she did. Obviously I had to go to an adult high school so I could study and work. And I arrived in there with such confusion [torpeza] in my head: unbelievable. My head was completely shut down. But I tried and tried until one day, WOW, as if I had woken up. Numbers, letters, all of it starts making sense . . . I was very self-demanding; I never went to bed with homework to be done. And I never had any problems: not one lesson or homework.

La chica en el siglo moderno [The modern-century girl]

*In high school I was part of the theater group, we put on two or three plays a year. The idea was to protest things that were going on. We prepared the plays and presented them for a week before the entire school, some 2500 students, everyone had to go. I am very shy, I can't speak in public. But when I dressed up for my role I forgot about people, I wasn't myself anymore, I was someone else. I liked it. It was a way of . . . I'm telling you, I was out on the street shouting **DOWN WITH THE YANKEES** and all that: so the plays were one way of making ourselves heard. But there's one character that everyone knew, she was from some other country or something: Tecla. Really controversial . . . She'd beat up her boss, she would defend herself against everyone. That's the character I enjoyed the most because it wasn't sad. She wanted to do what she thought she had to do, not being told what to do. She was studious, she liked adventure, traveling; and she didn't believe much in certain things, she believed that you can do anything. And it was almost similar to my own personality, or something like that. And everyone called me Tecla: Hi, Teclita, what's up? The character was sort of the modern-century girl, wearing sneakers and carrying her backpack; and she wouldn't hesitate to pick up some boy who's hitchhiking on the road. Wearing torn-up jeans—let's say a rebel without a cause. Her father being very*

machista, her mom too even if she doesn't want to. It was nice and fun, the character people liked the most. And I identified with it because back then we were among the first women who didn't hesitate to play soccer. It was maybe in my second year that I started to love soccer. I'm talking about the 1980s when it was sinful for women to kick the ball. [. . .]

I keep climbing from one year to another until I finish. My brothers didn't approve of my studying, so I wasn't in touch with them. My brother who's now in Spain was more supportive—but he told me to study business administration or to be a secretary: as soon as you graduate you have a job. But no! My dreams were big. I was thinking of NASA! Going to the moon! So I major in Physics & Math that in real life have no use. You get out of there and it's like nothing, absolutely nothing. So much frustration. Of course people studying accounting or bilingual secretary find jobs right out of high school—or back then they did. But I crash my head into the wall. Math & Physics. Useless. So I had no choice other than go on to university. And that was my goal: to go on to university. Maybe it was around my fourth year that my brothers said, WOW, this is serious, you really want to study—like I wasn't just another one in the group. I didn't call on them, I didn't come over; I stayed away from them. For them I was like a man: a woman must be quieter, not on the street. Not that I was violent or anything like that but we had different opinions. My mom—well obviously we were completely opposite. My dad did support me a bit, but I didn't want them to tell me what to do. They'd tell me you've got to be there at 8. I said, no, why 8 and not 6? What's the difference? We leave at 6, we work until 10, and then I have from 10 to 12 for myself. It's not that I said no. I was happy to help but didn't want them to impose their schedule on me, not only to take into account what was convenient for them but also for me. They didn't like that. [. . .]

When I finished high school my parents and siblings came to my graduation. Everyone but Julio and Saúl—Julio's excuse was that his brother-in-law was graduating the same day, Saúl also said something like that. I couldn't care less. I was ecstatic. I said WOW, this is the best, without one single problem with my studies, straight ahead, with good grades. I was one of the best students, and not many women graduate from Physics & Math, maybe there were 25 men and 3 women. So that day, the day I graduated was super. There were many awards, athletic awards, soccer awards—I was part of every event, I was the busiest one in the world. And maybe that's why I fall so easily for this gentleman, my son's father. I had no experience, I had been too busy, too focused on other things.

I met him when I was still in school, he was older than me. But he'd been my platonic love since I was 18, soon after moving to Cuenca. He was a basketball player with Ecuador's national team, not tall, not friendly [simpatico]; but he was my idol. As an athlete and soccer player, he was at all of the sports events, and he was in the newspapers. And kind of crazily I started saving the clippings, like any teenager following Luis Miguel. I said one day I'd like to meet him, he's in Cuenca, so maybe, who knows. Back then he wasn't playing basketball anymore; he played soccer and was active with the Azuay Sports Federation. I said I have to meet him, and I had an album with the newspaper clippings. That he doesn't know. And I cut out the things about him and the ones about me: this lady told me, Daniela, keep them, when you have children they'll see that at least you were there, someone was mentioning your name. He would appear in magazines and I would cut it out—and I didn't know him. Until one day there was an event at the public university, I had to both give and receive an award. I was standing up there, the trophy was bigger than me, and then I see him coming. WOW. My stomach was full of butterflies. I see him come, I said it

can't be possible, he didn't even know I existed. But he did know me: he went to watch women's soccer often. And he talked to me as if he had known me for my entire life: Oh, he said, here's the champion from school such and such. My name is this. But if I've known you for so long, I said to myself! I couldn't pretend, I didn't know, my hands were shaking, butterflies in the stomach. And then he told me that at the Federation there's this program about something in case you want to sign up; we're ready to help you, whatever you need. I went back home and everyone was there, my cousins, my friends, my sister. Guess what? I've met him. [. . .]

My dream was to study economics, and I was doing very well. It was a challenge: I thought I could do it, I thought that I was capable, and I liked numbers and it wasn't difficult for me. Literature, or history, that was difficult, I had to study for hours and memorize everything. But numbers were fun, like an electronic game that I always won. That was my best year in university, the best grades. And then things start to get complicated when my son is born. I can't leave him alone, he doesn't want the feeding bottle, only from his mom. So there's no choice other than drop out. Economics was from 8 to 12 in the morning and then 2 to 5 in the afternoon: it was meant to really discourage people. But I didn't give up, I looked for an alternative. I always wanted to focus on what I'd learned, I liked numbers: math, physics. And so I went to study Physics & Math in the educational sciences program. That was not the classical university but sort of distance education, and I tell you that it's not easy at all: it's your responsibility, you study by yourself, there's no teacher or anyone else to help you. But it was the way to reconcile the new person I was as a mother and also to keep studying. It was quite hard, to be honest. You study much more than in conventional school because it's all up to you. You'll see, my son would fall, get his lip cut, I got desperate, and I said this is it. I threw the books under the bed and said no more. Two

or three days later I started feeling so sad . . . and then I said to myself I've got out of worse. And I picked up my books again and got ahead. Always the same, I threw the books on the floor and stepped on them, angry as I was. And then two days later my conscience kicked back and I stayed up until 1 in the morning to catch up—you know that if you lose one day then everything is lost. It should have been five years but I think I lost two, one time I couldn't take the exams due to an administrative problem, and another time my son got sick. My son's dad was in charge of getting all the study material, that he did for me. At the end I took several classes at the same time, and my brain almost burst. It was all specialized classes: algebra, math, geometry, calculus, all at once. [. . .]

Una tristeza profunda [A deep sadness]

Let's say that psychologically my situation wasn't that great. I had worked hard and gathered about 3 million sucres as capital for me to keep working in the clothing business—that was enough to raise my child, and for him to study, and me too; my dream was always to go to grad school, maybe in math. But one good day the capital got lost. I left for Guayaquil Sunday night, and because I didn't want to travel with the cash, I asked my brother who's now in Ecuador to deposit the money in the bank on Monday. I arrived in Guayaquil but the money disappeared. It would seem that my brother got mugged—as if by magic. He said that he had been robbed on his way to the bank. My son's father told me, Daniela, he doesn't have one scrap, you really think he's been mugged? Perhaps your brother had gambling debts. My brother's wife came to me crying and told me that they were willing to sell everything they had to pay me back. And I felt sorry for her, and for her children, they already had four.

And just on top of that Julio invites my brothers to come here—the invitation was not for me but for my brothers. And I was very sad. I was at my uncle's in the Oriente and my aunt tells me, Daniela, you know what, you work hard, you've always worked hard: Would you like to go to the United States? The United States? And what am I going to do there? People do well, she says, and you like working. My cousin tells me that they'll send me and his sister; the two rebellious ones, we'll send them over, he tells me. I go back to Guayaquil and my son says: Mom, we've got you a scholarship to go to the United States. Are you all crazy? My mom was crying. You haven't told us anything, you're always doing things your way. But I didn't even know what it was all about. And only then do they give me the letter from Julio, offering the money for the person who can make up his mind, my brothers or me, anyone. But Saúl has said no, my other brother has said no, they're doing fine financially; and my younger brother who's now in Ecuador said that his wife was pregnant and he didn't want to leave her. So I was the one option left. And they knew that if they let me think about it I wouldn't come—it had to be fast.

At that time I was disappointed, maybe in a weak moment. Already I was teaching, they had called me to work even before graduating. It was only an adjunct contract, not directly hired by the Education Department, so it wasn't much income. But I was happy because I was gaining experience. But that year—my brother's invitation arrives in March, and in February it's one of the longest and worst teachers' strikes in Ecuador, and there was nothing to do to, nothing. The government wasn't listening at all, teachers were sewing their mouths shut, crucifying themselves to catch the world's attention. And my brother convinces me. He says, look, I never thought you were worthless, I never thought you can't do things right. You studied, you got ahead, you're doing something: make up your mind and leave. What? My mom didn't want

me to leave. I talked to my son's father, and he tells me, Daniela, I know you well, and if you make a decision there's nothing I can do; so it's better that you tell me when you're leaving, and what we'll do with the boy. The boy would stay with my parents, I said. In any case do think about it, he told me. That was Tuesday, I left for Guayaquil, and on Thursday I called him and told him to meet me in Cuenca in the evening. When he saw me he said that if I had come with the child it was because I was leaving. Then he begged me not to leave, he told me mostly about the news on the papers about people dying in Mexico. It's not that he told me to stay so we could fight together and find some way out—no. He just said that if I was making that choice neither he nor anyone else could do anything about it—that if it wasn't today it'd be tomorrow, so he would support my decision. That same Thursday I told him I was leaving. Again he said it was dangerous and begged me not to do it because of the child. I simply told him, you know what, I leave on Saturday. Then he opened the door for me: OK, if that's what you want, leave.

You can imagine what I've been through in my life for making decisions too fast. I don't know what was going on in my mind—but I do know that something was going on. At that moment I wasn't satisfied with what I did and had. You get to a point where . . . I can't really explain. It's as if I'd been given an anesthetic and I didn't feel sorry about anyone. I don't know what happened. Because if I had really thought it through—if I had thought about leaving my son . . . Maybe leaving your partner is fine, maybe there I'll find another man. But my son. I don't know. That's why for me—like for other people who've come—it's difficult because I only start to understand when I'm here. When things get bad, when I'm not even able to tell why I'm suffering or what's going on. It was something that I don't know if I'll ever feel again; it was like this deep sadness, something I had to decide now or never. And I wasn't the kind

of person who was dreaming about leaving for the United States—this country is the one I thought about the least. Perhaps I thought of going to Chile, maybe Mexico for grad school, or maybe Cuba. But that was it—I didn't think beyond that. And I did like what I was doing, I was happy with myself, and my son, and the things I had. I don't know. The truth is that up to this day I don't know. My mind was blank and I don't know. And if they give me time to think, to say goodbye, to cry a bit, I swear you I don't come. But it wasn't like that: one week and a half and I was on my way. My brother had sent the money to the man who was supposed to bring us, the arrangements were made, and he was leaving. He got there and he said we leave in two weeks. And once the man gets the money everything has to be done very fast.

The worst part is that I had already said good-bye to my son's father, and because my passport was missing a stamp I had to go back to Cuenca. The same Saturday I was leaving Guayaquil for Quito I have to go back to Cuenca. And I'm on the bus and I see my son's father walking down the street. He had this black leather jacket, black pants, a white shirt. Such was my desperation, my anxiety to get off the bus and tell him I'm not leaving, I'm staying here. I was crying, not real tears but tears inside. But I didn't stay. I didn't get off the bus. Monday I was in Quito, and the rest—you can't even imagine that.

Hasta las coreanas hablaban español [Even the Koreans spoke Spanish]

You'll see how it works—if you never worked at the garment factories. There are four or five people with big signs on Sixth and Eighth Avenues in Manhattan, and they'll take in dozens of workers, and tell you that you'll have two hours of trial. So what do you do? You do your best, you want the job. They get what they want, and then they tell you thank you, thank you, thank you: and they have only four or five stupid ones

stay. But then another group comes in and they do the same, and that way they get ahead with the work. It's their way of cheating people, and they don't tell you how much you'll earn, only that you've been chosen to stay. Thursday comes, Friday comes, and you still don't know how much you'll earn. On Saturday they tell you that you'll be earning \$3 an hour . . . But you have a job, they say, come back next week, and Friday we'll pay the week—because the first week goes for them. So you're coming back on the train, and you say, \$3 an hour, you've got to work ten hours to make \$30; you've got to pay for lunch, you pay for the train . . . So what do you decide? I'm not coming back, I've got to look somewhere else: I'm going to kill myself and there's nothing there, it won't even cover food. If they owe you something you'll go back, and they'll tell you to come back next week.

Two times it happened to me, and then is when I said this time they'll pay. I start toughening up. I already knew their tactics, they had us stay, maybe 20 workers, and then rumors start going around that they won't pay. On Friday you wondered if they would pay . . . I was on the bus thinking: Will I come back on Monday? Of course I will! OK, I said to myself, how much is each one of these dresses? And then four bad snips in each dress and my week was already paid for—and then I'd never come back. So at least my conscience was at peace, the accounts were settled. And the next day to look for another job. It's not wickedness but frustration with what they do to you. Sometimes people won't tell you how much they suffer—because one feels ashamed.

One time with my sister-in-law we went to this really big factory in Brooklyn, they made sweatpants. The job was cutting threads and they paid by the piece. So when we had cut about 100 pants they tell us you'll be earning 3 cents the piece. That time I couldn't see the colors—greens, blues, pinks, they got all mixed up. I wasn't making

progress, my hand was swollen, and every so often someone came up and you had to say how many dozens you had, and they'd write it down and take them away. And that's the worst part. Even if I was earning nothing, I wished they'd let me alone—and not all that psychological torture. They'd say, look you've only earned this much. And I said I've been working since 8 in the morning and it's lunch time—and you've only earned \$6. My hand is so swollen I can't make a fist, I feel pain here, I feel pain there, and she comes and tells me how little I've made to make me work faster. I tell you that I couldn't take the factories—such psychological torture and such physical ill-treatment that you can't take.

I said no. I said—it's that idea that gets in everyone's mind: five years in the university, without sleeping, without eating, without going out dancing—for this crap? People couldn't even speak Spanish well. I said no. And then it starts getting into my head that I want to know this country's culture. I start thinking that if I spoke English I'd be an important person. I think and think and just couldn't sleep. And how can I learn English? At the factories even the Koreans spoke Spanish: not well, but they spoke it. And on my own I decide to quit. I felt bad—at that time they were already giving me the chance to work 72 hours a week, you could do overtime. But I say no, and then I decide to work in a house. It's the only place where I can learn the language and know how a gringo lives. [. . .]

The mister was very nice—he says, Daniela, your name is so hard: I'm going to call you María. They were orthodox Jews; a couple with three girls. He didn't speak Spanish but the wife did—a little. You can't imagine how much I suffered there. First the language. I was learning some with the man—but every day I did something stupid. Daniela, the missus said, this is basura: Esto basura. So I put it in the trash—

no: she wanted me to put it in the fridge. Her Spanish was terrible. And every day like that. She called me on the phone and told me what to do and it was all upside down. I was frustrated, she got mad at me, and when he came home she told him. And I was scared because I didn't know how to communicate with him. He was bad-tempered. I ask myself, what kind of change is this? Even I was starting to speak bad Spanish. The girls mocked me, they said I spoke like a baby, that my English was bad—so I practically didn't speak. But the missus didn't give me any chance to write to her in English, and she didn't write notes to me. She wanted to learn Spanish—she thought she knew Spanish! And the man was bad-tempered: I cried every blessed day of my life. I wanted to jump out of the third-floor window. I didn't know how to communicate with people. Why was he so grumpy? Men are not supposed to get into domestic things. The missus wasn't bad-tempered; but he was.

One day he tells me, Daniela, I want you to iron these suits for me, and he leaves about 50 suits for me to iron. Today I want you to do only this and I'm going to pay you well. You've got no idea—by mid-afternoon I couldn't move my arm. He comes back in the evening: Daniela, no bueno. He grabs the suits and throws them all to the floor. What frustration! I stay staring at the suits, I cry, and I start kicking the suits around and stepping on them, the soles of my sneakers leaving marks on them. I cried enough, and then I tell myself: What's wrong with me? Why am I crying? I pick up the suits, I shake them a bit, I hang them up again. Next day he asks me: Daniela, did you finish? Yes, I tell him. He feels the suits with his hand: Very good job, he says, thank you very much; and he gives me \$20 extra for every 10 suits. So I stay thinking . . . From now on I'm not going to suffer anymore. Because this man is crazy: if he knew I stepped on his suits. No more crying. He'd yell at me and nothing. I knew

that when things were wrong they were right and when they were right they were wrong.

And then he would say, Daniela, did you see my shoes? And I was like, the brown shoes? Daniela, you're speaking English! We start communicating, and I ask him to send me to school. OK, he says, that he'd give me \$20 for school per week. But the deal was between him and myself: he didn't tell the missus. One day she goes to my room and finds the receipt for the school, and she confronts me: that I didn't need to learn the language because she could speak Spanish. I said OK . . . Next week it was this beautiful day, sunny, 8 am Monday morning, and I'm thinking that this life was no life, and that the American dream is to learn English—when I can finally talk to people and understand what they say. I get to the subway stop and take the same train back. I call the missus and tell her I'm not going because of some accident. She says OK, come tomorrow. I go on Tuesday and I tell her: you know what, if you don't pay this much, I quit. But Daniela, she says, you know there are no jobs, and the children like you, and this and that—at least wait for my husband so he can decide. I stay and work like an animal for three hours. Then I call my brother Julio on the phone, you know what, I'm quitting, I'm going to change jobs. No, he says, you're already earning money, you don't want to quit. So I say to myself: Can it be true that I can't do anything? Missus, I'm leaving. The door is open, she says. I rushed away! I got the four things I had and left.

Next day I was speaking English on the phone and looking for work; and it was then that I got the job I have until now. I go out to look at the newspapers, and this Colombian woman gives me the paper where they'd put the ad—Newsday, I think. The ad said that there were three children, one of them a six month-old. Person with

experience, lovely family, blah blah blah. OK, I say, this is interesting—the six-month child speaks no English and no Spanish: I get rid of one. I call on the phone, she asks me if I have experience, yes, where, I say with this family in Brooklyn, she asks how old the children were, can you give me their number? A while later she calls me and asks me why I quit. I tell her that it was because they didn't want to send me to school and because my room was too cold. And where was your room? In the basement. And was it just that it was cold? Yes, I like to be warm. And how's your English? More or less, I tell her, we're talking, aren't we? And I got the job.

When I get to the house I found two sheets of paper with all I had to do throughout the year. If you don't speak English that's no problem, she says—if you can understand what's written there that's all we need, that's going to be our way of communicating. She went point by point and I understood well because my problem was the listening—I could read well. And this missus talks very fast. And then she says, no problem, if you want to learn English, OK, I'll have you go to school; the school is nearby and classes start next week. That had been Tuesday: on Thursday I was ready to quit. I cried desperately because the missus seems crazy—she talked so fast and she doesn't give you time to open your mouth; and when she's frustrated she starts crying. So I thought I'd better leave. On Saturday my first week she pays me, she calls the children and asks them if they like me, they say yes; and then she asks me to forgive her. She's not a bad person, it's just that sometimes there's no communication. She said that I had done an excellent job, and she asked me to come back next week. But the good part of all this is that from the beginning I find I have this special chemistry with the six-month old child. A tiny little child with two little teeth and huge blue eyes. No sooner did he see me that he smiled and I smiled too. He came in to my arms and it was as if we were meant to be together.

Mis Jefes Son Judíos Modernos [My Bosses are Modern Jews]

There's been a lot of suffering, yes, first of all because of language. But it's been nice. I've been to all the places they've taken me to, even to Florida; I've been to many places with them. The job has been hard but pleasant. The missus herself introduced me to soccer here: she once saw me playing with the children and told me about some friends of hers that played. She and her husband like sports, and the children too. So we've all played together—we played basketball together in the backyard, and it's chaos—there are six of us in the family, we play men versus women. So things changed. Any job is hard, any job is complicated and more so when you work with children, you have to be very careful. But it has been nice. And now I can say that I've gotten to know this country's culture; because I haven't been only with them but also gone with them to many other places and seen many people. But not just as the servant—the day I go out with them I do nothing. So that is something nice.

Say, for example, I call my sister-in-law on the phone, I tell her I'm at the Yankee Stadium. What are you doing there, she's all surprised. Watching baseball. Did they take you? Yes. And they paid for your ticket? But it's only \$40, I tell her, I guess for them it's not much—given how much they exploit me. Perhaps now it's changed a little because the teens don't want to spend time with the family anymore, they want to be with their friends. But the small one yes: he is an Islanders fan, the hockey team. So I'm also an Islanders fan. He'll say: What do you want me to give you? And I have to accept what he says. You want to go see the Islanders? Of course . . . And it's cold in there and I need to wear double socks. I don't know. In my case I can say I've been lucky. For one thing they've always paid me on time, even if they pay me little. And then the people I know that work in the same job will say that they never get presents for their birthday or are taken out anywhere. What I tell them sounds like I'm lying—

but I have pictures, some place where we celebrated my birthday, or the Yankee Stadium. So it's not the kind of slavery that you'd call the domestic servant's slavery, the person who's locked up between four walls—it's not that. Even on Saturdays I'll go watch the children play soccer and I'm the one who shouts the most; and the children listen to me more than to their parents. Because I'm from Latin America so they say I know about soccer. And they tell me about the game and we give each other high-fives.

In the beginning it was more difficult because of the missus: she can't talk normally, she screams at you, she gets hysterical. She calls me on the phone and yells at me. And all I've learned to do is to hang up on her. She calls me again and asks why I hung up, and again I hang up until she stops screaming. And then she calls me and says, I'm sorry, I'm very nervous, she's frustrated with something. And she's not shouting anymore. I felt very bad until I got to know her better and saw that she's all bark and no bite. She'd get all upset, and I'd say nothing back. She'd tell me, Daniela, you want to speak English? Then open your mouth, say what you think, don't be so quiet. And one day this mouth opened up. She said, Daniela, you notice you're speaking English? I said yes, isn't that what you wanted? I will speak. And I was so mad that I was crying. She said: What's wrong with you? Did anyone do something to you? I told her I was scared of her—that she shouted for everything. That the children were not the problem. You are the problem, I told her. I pointed at her with my finger. You. You. You. She told me maybe you're having trouble with some boyfriend of yours. I said no. You're my only problem. The person I should be closest to because I'm taking care of your children: you are the problem. Daniela, she said, you speak good English now, but watch your mouth. Why are you talking to me like that? You know why I yelled at you? I was yelling back at her. Because if I didn't my head was going to explode—

because it's too much. Too much silence, too much silence, too much silence. And finally there's an escape. Ah, OK: that's what she told me. OK. And from then on I talked back to her. She's good, she's generous; it's just that you need to know how to handle her, and pay no attention to her. Sometimes she's shouting at me and I'm looking at her but I don't care. She thinks I'm suffering—no way.

[. . .]

My bosses are modern Jews, and on Saturday they had the bar-mitzvah for the boy that I've raised. And because I'm kind of the nanny I had to be everywhere: he wasn't to be in any pictures without me. A huge party, and this was their last child to do it, so even bigger than the previous two. They're not religious, they never go to church, only the party. Very elegant, people wearing tuxedos, black ties. Real, real nice—something I will never forget. Super elegant. And you know, my birthday is on the 15th, but for some reason the missus has this calendar that she never loses saying that it's on the 17th. So then according to them my birthday was the same day as the party. Double celebration. And every time the child spoke—you know, the speeches they make—first he thanked me for having been with him all his life, saying that he loved me and I was his second mom: and then happy birthday, happy birthday, happy birthday Daniela. He's very sweet. And then they call the people who are special, the ones they think have been close to them, those who supposedly mean much in their life. So obviously I was called.

There were about 230 people invited, 100 children and more than 120 adults. All of the people who were serving were young, dressed in black and white, real nice. The boy himself had bought the earrings for me to wear—the dress I bought myself, but he got me the accessories. First it was cocktail-style—in the beginning, from 7:30 to 9. At

9 the dancing began, and then at 11 the dinner—each table had your name. Beef, chicken, there was plenty of food; and then they give you ice cream, they take it to each table and you get what you want. Every time I was tired of dancing I went back to the table and had some ice cream. But I think I danced for about four hours. And on Friday there was a really nice dinner at this special place, that I liked too. And mostly the people, the extended family, they're sweet; and since I've been with them for so many years it wasn't complicated or anything. [. . .]

When they're done with the candles they dance the waltz, and he danced with his mom. And in the middle of the waltz he grabs the microphone and says: Where is Daniela? I want to finish the song with her. I don't get up or anything but he leaves his mom and comes to dance with me. And I end up dancing with him in the middle of the floor.

II. Digo estoy muy joven como para ir a morir allá

[I say to myself I'm too young to go die there]

In 1995 Daniela left Ecuador for the United States. She was 30; her son was 8. When I interviewed her in 2008 she had never gone back. Her son was 21 and had recently dropped out of university to get married. Why did Daniela leave Ecuador? Why has she not returned?

Daniela's two eldest brothers now live in Queens, Julio since 1990 and Saúl since 2001. Another brother and two sisters live in Spain. Only two out of the eight siblings are still in Ecuador. Emigration, it would seem, runs in the family. But Daniela's departure, like Julio's five years earlier, predate the massive exodus following the Ecuadorian financial collapse in the late 1990s. And yet emigration does go back in the family tree. Their father left the village in Azuay province for the

Ecuadorian Oriente around 1940 (at age 9). Back then, says Daniela, going to the Oriente was like going to the United States now. Ten years later he came back to the village, married and had his first child, and started leaving again. The children were always waiting for the father to come back. Daniela's brothers resented the father's absence, but soon followed his example, leaving the Andean village to work on the coast.

Outmigration from the Southern highlands reshaped mid-twentieth-century Ecuador. For men in the Southern highlands, the question was not whether but when to leave. For women it was less clear: What were they supposed to do? The first daughter in her family, Daniela would confront the question early on. At 12 she had the first opportunity: her father tried to take her with him to the coast, and she said no. She wanted to stay with her mother and help her with the house and children. Yet she did not want to be like her mother, and wanted to study instead. At 18 she finally overcame the family resistance and left for high school in Cuenca. And that would not be all: soon enough she was riding buses across the country; like her father four decades earlier, she travelled to the Oriente in search of work. It was only the preface: much more leaving lay ahead for her.

In hindsight, Daniela's early restlessness can be seen as the first steps of her migratory career: an international migrant in the making, so to speak. She was looking for something and could not find it, and her quest would take her from one place to another in Ecuador and eventually out of Ecuador. She rejected her mother's life and she rejected marriage. She also rejected her father's attempt to take her with him to the coast, but his absence, somehow, made sense to her: "You know I adore my mom, but I wasn't one to sit down on her lap. I've always connected more with my dad." But the United States were never part of her plan. She had considered studying abroad, some

day, maybe graduate school in Chile or Mexico. In March of 1995 she left for New York City; she can describe the circumstances but not explain why.

When Julio sent the letter offering to pay the \$5000-trip to whoever in the family made up his mind, two circumstances had combined to undermine Daniela's confidence. First, she had asked her younger brother to take some money of hers to the bank, and supposedly he had been mugged. Second, the teachers' union had embarked upon one of the longest and fiercest strikes in Ecuadorian history. The loss of her money hit her hard; she had been saving and had plans. The teachers' strike also threatened her plans. The point was not that her pay was low (she had a weekend sales job to make up for that); it was not even that classes had virtually stopped. Daniela's account stresses the government's indifference. It was the official contempt that undercut her idea of herself; the contrast between the public degrading of the teaching profession and the achievement her degree had meant in her eyes.

Daniela's brothers declined Julio's offer; they were not ready. And there was no time to think: because of the clandestine trip arrangements, things had to move fast. Once and again I ask her about her decision, and she repeats that she does not know what she was thinking. Her family did not push her to leave, but no one tried to stop her. Her mother did some crying, but she seemed resigned. Her son's father told her to think about it, but he did not say no. Even her eight-year-old son seemed fine with it: "We've got you a scholarship for the United States," he merrily announced. Her family knew she was unsatisfied, and they did not know what to do with her. "We'll send off the two rebels," said her cousin in the Oriente, referring to Daniela and the cousin who would travel with her; they were relieved to have them take their discontent somewhere else.

Daniela had looked for her own path, and her path now seemed blocked. The trip was the one chance she had; the challenge, the opportunity to raise the stakes, the

spectacular way out. How could she say no? She had wanted to be different, and she had to account for that. The decision was difficult; somehow she knew it was too much. She talks about the “deep sadness” of having to choose: it was an all-or-nothing and now-or-never choice. She talks about feeling numbed, and she remembers seeing her son’s father from the bus in Cuenca: the impulse to get off and tell him she is staying, the burning anxiety inside. Numbed, blinded, her tears running dry, ten days later Daniela was in Quito to meet the smuggler and the rest of the group.

Her first memories of New York City are detailed: the garment factories, the first houses where she worked, the pain of not communicating or fitting in. But one year after arriving Daniela found the job she has had until now; and from then on the narrative changes. She describes some of the initial interaction with the new family, and the moment she met the six-month-old child. She can also talk about some very special events: the game at the Yankee Stadium, or recently the child’s bar-mitzvah. But between the beginning and the immediate past there is little. Her account loses density; she moves to more general comments and reconstructs fewer dialogues; the plot has fewer angles. The more settled narrative suggests that Daniela has settled down.

When I talked to my father’s son we said I’d be gone for three years—maybe five at the most. But at the moment you’re making this decision, you think five years is an eternity. So you start thinking—but the thing is that you shut your brain off so as not to think; you don’t want to think; you wish that tomorrow or the day after tomorrow will be the day you’ll come back and everything will be fine.

Daniela has been in the United States for 13 years now, and for the last 12 she has worked for the same family. How have these 12 years passed? When she arrived in the Long Island house the last child was six-months old, and she has just been to his

bar-mitzvah. When she left Ecuador her own son was eight years old, and now he is 21. Daniela herself was 30 when she walked into the United States, and now is 43. As she looks back she can tell she has been busy: she has learned to speak English, and she has learned from the inside what the American lifestyle is all about. But how long has it taken? She has much more to tell about the first year in the United States than about the following 12. What happened in between?

The 12 years can be broken up into different periods. Describing her first months in New York City, Daniela says that it was then that her true “ordeal” began. Her sister-in-law took her to work in the garment factories, and then she got herself into domestic work. She felt lost and empty, she says, and she did not know why.

I don't know what happened. I suffered much on the trip, and then . . . I realized that something had happened to me because about one year after getting here it was as if I woke up—only then did I realize what I'd done, what was happening to me, that my family was far away, what I didn't have. I realized that everything was already ruined. Only then did it start to hurt. Until that moment my mind was blank. I told my brother, help me, I don't know what's wrong with me, I don't even know why it hurts. They took me out, they took me dancing—but I was somewhere else. Only after the first year here did I realize that I was a woman, that I was a human being—who knows what happened to me.

Her memories are clouded in fog. As if turning off the lights had eased the transition into her new life, Daniela remembers little—something happened, but she only knew it when it started to be over, and she does not know what it was. The trip had been traumatic and her decision was still an open wound. Daniela focused on working and survival. There were no visible traces left.

Only after my first year here did I finish paying my brother what I owed him for the trip. That's what I asked God the most for—not to fail my brother. Only when I'm done paying do I start thinking about my son's absence, I think that time's passing by, that I'm losing the best years. Until one day my son tells me to leave him alone. I call him on the phone and he's gone out to play. I tell him that I'd told him I'd call at this time. Mom, he says, I have things to do too, I can't be waiting for you to call. I wrote him every day and when he didn't write me back and I resented it. In the beginning he wrote me, then not so much. And then I realized that I was too much on top of him, too anxious that he wouldn't forget me. And when I'd been here two years he was turning ten, and I spared no money for the celebration. He sent me the video, and I saw lots of children. So instead of feeling sad it made me very happy. And then it's when I start seeing things differently. I realize you've got to let time go by and let everyone else grow up too.

Not until she was done paying did she start to miss and think about her son; and only then did she feel that her absence might be too long. Back in Ecuador, however, her son had not gone through the same process; his life had not changed so sharply, and he had grown independent from his mother. Daniela realized that she could live with distance: she certainly kept sending money, but also gave her son more space. Some two years after arriving in New York City the first phase was over, and another one was about to begin.

Maybe up to my third year here my son's father wrote me and asked me to come back. But then he kind of resented that I kept saying no—because it was only then that I stopped crying, that I sort of woke up and got away from the shell around me. I said no: It's not possible to come and cry all this time and then just go back. And it was right around this time that there's the economic situation in Ecuador—a great excuse

to stay here up to this day. Then it wasn't just to work for a while and go back—the whole family was broke so I had to help out some.

During her first years in the United States her son's father asked her to come back; three years is the time frame they had talked about before she left. She was not ready to go back, however, and the late 1990s Ecuadorian financial crisis came right in time to help her, she laughs. Who could tell her to go back when the Ecuadorian economy was falling apart? In the end he resented her refusal, and they did not talk for years. Daniela had learned to think about her son differently, and she was now leaving her son's father in the distant past.

And then one day after seven years without talking to him someone calls me on my cell. Not long ago. I was on the train, I hear this strange voice. I asked who it was and he told me his name. I almost dropped the phone. How come? Where from? I didn't give my number to anyone. I didn't know if I should be upset, or if I liked that he was calling. After seven years I didn't even remember his voice. He said that he had talked to my son and learned that he had dropped out of school. And then he told me, Daniela, it's almost 14 years since you've left. I told him, yes—but you've lived in the same place for 50 years, and never left. So what's the problem? What's the complaint? He said: Daniela, all these years you've been there I thought you might have changed.

Daniela perceives her son's father's disapproval and is upset. She makes it clear to him that he is in no position to tell her what to do. And she turns the tables on him: He has never left Cuenca, so why should she leave New York City? Daniela has wanted to become invisible, and she has slowly untied herself from the past. She is alone on the train and it takes her several seconds to identify his voice. The man she

left behind in Cuenca suddenly reappears to tell her that her son has dropped out of school, and that it may be time for her to come back. She reacts badly to the pressure; he tells her she has not changed, and she is angry and flattered at once.

Her father has also recently told her that it might have been too long. She does not get angry, but she knows what to say: “I tell him, Daddy, when I said that I wanted to come back you told me not to because the economy is bad—and the economy isn’t better now.” Her son has also told her that it was not a good idea to go back: “No, Mommy, he said, I’m still young and need your help. What are you going to do here? It’s difficult—the economy is super difficult.” Lately, however, he too has mentioned that it may already be time to return.

Maybe until one year ago I thought desperately of going back. I thought about my son, I thought that it’s been too long. Now my son has gotten married and I don’t find a reason to leave. I want them to live their life, at least for a while. You can’t get back the lost time. I don’t know. When I had all the back pain is when I least thought about coming back. What am I going to do there? I thought—for better or worse here one way or another—I don’t know. But since my son got married—now I’m starting to accept it, little by little, but it was like the same emptiness all over again.

Daniela did not want to go back when feeling sick. Now that her back is better, it does not seem that she has worked enough. Back then she had looked for her son’s father to tell her to stay in Ecuador—and he did not or she did not hear if he did. Now she looks for her son and her father to tell her to return—but she does not want them to tell her what to do. When she suggested she might go back they told her that the economy was too bad—now they have told her it may be time to return. But she needs to make the decision herself. When will it be the right time?

I came without thinking twice. I didn't say good bye to anyone. I didn't get anyone's phone number, I completely lost touch. And I don't want that to happen now. I have to go when I feel the need to be there myself. Not because of anyone but myself. I say to myself: I came here and worked for a long time but I don't even know the city. So I want to give myself time. Not to get to know the city—but to start focusing on the idea that I'm going to have another lifestyle. Of course you get tired of this lifestyle here—it's no life. But I feel I'm too young to go there to die. I mean: I have to program myself psychologically. To think about what I want to do. I don't even have a house there yet. I haven't bought anything, I haven't done anything. Not that I'm going to stay here forever to make money. But maybe—my dream is to build my house myself, even if it's small but my style, Daniela-style.

What does she want? What is the Daniela-style? What can she do with her past? Daniela left her country in defiance of her family, not because they stopped her but because it was her way to say what she needed to say. After so many years she cut herself off from her family, and now she must make her decision alone. Daniela has “polished her loneliness to perfection,” and now she does not know what to do with it.¹⁴⁸ When she is done working she locks herself up in her room, and with a book she got from the library she practices physics or math; she has forgotten most of the theory but not the applications. Sometimes she is too tired and watches TV instead—she wants to learn Italian. The Ecuadorian teacher has been trying to wrap up her long absence, and she does not know how. From her fiercely lonely room in the fiercely lonely Long Island suburbs, Daniela broods over her next move.

¹⁴⁸ This is an attempt at translating the expression “trabajar la soledad como un metal maleable” by Ecuadorian poet and novelist Jorge Enrique Adoum ([1976] 2002: 14).

III. Más helado menos frijoles [More ice cream less beans]

How can one understand an emigrant's life? How can one analyze it sociologically?

The first section of this chapter presented an edited version of Daniela's original account, all the way from the Azuay village to the Long Island house. The second section sought to take some distance from Daniela's voice, reorganizing the material to focus on the circumstances surrounding her departure from Ecuador and the reasons why she has not returned. In this section I push the analysis one step further by drawing the links between these decisions (and non-decisions) and Daniela's more general thinking about her life. The previous section asked why Daniela has stayed away from her native country. This section sketches an answer.

An individual life, sociology suggests, can be interpreted as a biographical solution to social or historical contradictions. An emigrant's central decision (to leave) and his or her central non-decision (to return) can be seen in this light. What are the contradictions underlying Daniela's emigrant life? The first daughter after three brothers, Daniela experienced the conflict between herself and the world early on (she jokes that she became a rebel in her mother's womb). How was she supposed to be different from her brothers? What did it mean to be a woman? And later on in her life: What did it mean to be a mother? What were mothers expected to do? These questions took Daniela away from the village, and eventually away from Ecuador.

"They told me what to do and I did the opposite—not that I harmed anyone, but I simply didn't listen." Daniela was expected to help with the household chores: "There were 12 of us in the family, and while 11 sat down to talk, they sent me to cook, because I was the first woman. The pots were bigger than me, and I never cooked enough to fill their bellies. My dad got mad and punished me, and believe it or not I didn't learn to cook." At school there were more options: "I never finished the embroidering assignment, and I learned electricity instead." Her teachers were

“modern,” remembers Daniela, not telling boys or girls which crafts to choose. The battle between family and school organizes her childhood account.

Only at 18 did she manage to leave for high school in Cuenca. By herself in the city, finally free from family and village, Daniela’s memories shine with challenge and novelty. The voiceless rebel finds her voice: she is one of the best students; she stands out on the soccer field; people acknowledge her theater roles. The more she is part of the new social world, the less she is in touch with her disapproving brothers. I ask her if her family went to see her play *Tecla*, and I look at her older brother Saúl, now quietly sitting next to her. “Perhaps it’s only today that my brother is learning about it,” she says.

Daniela graduated from high school, fell in love with a well-known local athlete, moved on to university—and by her third semester in college her son was born. Her reputation with the family had been improving: they recognized that “I wasn’t just another one in the group.” The out-of-wedlock child did not go well with her family, of course; but it was also the chance to bring Daniela back into the family fold. She remembers her father’s reaction, supportive and menacing at once: “Look, he told me, it’s your life—but I wish that child doesn’t go through what I did. No dad, that won’t happen. It won’t happen, he told me, because I’ll be there to make sure it doesn’t.” And this was one of her brothers’ reaction—another display of stifling family warmth: “Well, we’ve never done anything for you, but the day you don’t treat that child well, we’ll be right there.”

The baby helped reestablish the bonds between Daniela and her family. She had done wrong and they were upset, and it was time for the family to reclaim its authority (no one took the child’s father seriously—only one sister met him). Now that she needed protection Daniela could be expected to be normal again. She had left the village and found her way in the new world. The first one to graduate from high

school and start university, Daniela was different, and her family was uncomfortably impressed. Now they were ready to take her back. As she gave up some of her goals to adjust to her maternal responsibilities, it felt as though she was just another one in the group—again.

But it's not that my son was nature's mistake. It's not that I was frustrated, or crying, not knowing what to do, what happened to me, why—no. It was the best, the best that ever happened to me. I had him because I wanted to—it's not that he came to ruin my life. I did feel bad sometimes because I couldn't give him everything I wanted to. Not that he didn't have toys or anything, but, yes, it was hard when I had to study for exams and had to have him go to bed early, and I had to fight with him, I couldn't spoil him that much. And then I felt guilty. I guess you never know, you're never ready, and then things happen and it's then when you say no.

Daniela had just started to find her way to be a woman—and now she had to be a mother. She switched to distance education to take care of her child and study at the same time; her life was now split in two. Her account of university turns bleaker: she stays more at home, she worries about her son, she throws her books on the floor. When her son entered elementary school, Daniela had him live with her parents, now settled in Guayaquil. Was it acceptable not to be with her child, even when she saw him most weekends? Was it acceptable not to see him for several years when she left for New York City? Her own father, after all, had often been absent when she was growing up.

My dad's always thought that if I were there I couldn't give my son more attention—because he'd have to study and obviously I'd have to work hard to get ahead; so we'd have little time to see each other, only in the evenings. So for my dad this is normal. Of

course he says that the mother's presence is the most important—but then he tells me just think that here you'd have to work 14 hours a day to give him a better life, and he's going to be with his friends; you won't have time to be with him.

Daniela folds her story into her father's story; she ties her absence to her father's absence. But the two trajectories are less parallel than she would like to suggest, and she knows it. For one thing, her father does distinguish between father and mother; Daniela mentions it in passing but puts the difference aside. Second, her father would come home more often, even if communications are easier now: "My brother Julio, you know, he's very resentful. And sometimes I tell him: Look at what we're doing with our children now. There's no reason, and it's even worse. Because my dad at least came back every 10 months—my brother didn't go back for 12 years, I haven't come back for 13." Daniela nonetheless looks for her father's approval: rootlessness, she may want to say, is rooted in family life.

I arrived here with this rebel attitude, this 30-year old girl who wanted no one to tell her what to do. And I was upset that they took me to this Guayaquil suburb—because I didn't think that NYC was like this. They bring me here and they take me around to see Brooklyn, the Bronx . . .

After travelling across half a continent in dangerous conditions, NYC was disappointing; it reminded her of the poor areas in Guayaquil. She did not like the city, and she would like the jobs even less. At the garment factories there was little space for defiance, even if "this 30-year old girl who wanted no one to tell her what to do" occasionally found her way—as when badly snipping the dresses, or simply by quitting. The work in house-cleaning, on the other hand, left almost no space.

I felt so bad in the beginning—when I locked myself up to work in a house. That’s the worst hell I could have gone through in my life. I used to do whatever I wanted and go anywhere I wanted—always. And now to come here and enslave yourself just for personal comfort—I don’t know. To be with strangers—that was the worst, that broke off with everything I had lived so far. And sometimes my family in Ecuador tells me, you that live in America, what mischief you must get into! If they knew what one goes through—we’re more innocent than before, nothing like they imagine. And it’s better that they think that—so they don’t know the misery we’re suffering here! To be locked up between four walls, to deal all day with someone and then have to stay right there.

And then she pauses and adds: “But I guess it hasn’t been that bad because I’m still doing the same thing—at another place, though.” Daniela began working in the house on Long Island about one year after arriving in New York City, and never left. Her boss’s temper issues aside, the match was good: “They are athletic people; I like sports and so do they. And I was still young and full of energy—so it was perfect for me.” Daniela remembers the misery, and no less forcefully she highlights what she has liked.

Once I arrived here—perfect. This country fit with my ideas perfectly: how people are, how they think— not that because you’re a woman you must do this or that and be at the man’s side. And I’m not talking about men outside the house—inside the house. I fit perfectly with women’s way of thinking—and people in general. And to not pay attention to gossip. Back there you’re thinking that everyone’s looking down on you—they’ll stick some label on you and that’ll be it.

Daniela gradually cut herself off, not only from Ecuador, but also Queens; she would visit her brothers, but Roosevelt Avenue was far away. In her first live-in-maid

jobs she had felt locked up. In the new job she was also locked up, but her prison was now the American lifestyle, at its best. She could see it from the inside and become part of it—learn to speak English, watch a game at Yankee Stadium, go on vacation to Florida, play basketball in the yard. Daniela has been part of the family she works for—the invisible part. Amid the cheerful routines of the American suburbs she has found her invisible space.

The more she settled in to the new job, the more tenuous the links with the world back home became. Over the years Daniela applied herself to creating distance between herself and her past. The distance, in fact, was already there, but she had to find the words for it. There was something different about her, there was some reason for her to be far away, and she had to find it in her mind. The first victim would be her son's father, the "local athlete" she had fallen for upon seeing his picture in the newspaper. The word "local" used to mean that he was part of the Cuenca circles that Daniela, an outsider from the countryside, wanted access to. Now it suggests something else: the local athlete may have been too local.

He's the type of person who says I was born here, I have my friends here, I'm not going anywhere. He'd tell me, you're made to move back and forth, but not me. He had his job, his habits, his friends. He's kind of rooted in the city center: those people grow up and die right there, they don't go anywhere.

To create distance with her son would be more complicated. Daniela felt guilty when she had her son go to bed early so she could study for her exams. She may have felt guiltier when sending him off to live with her parents in Guayaquil. Her long absence weighs on her shoulders. Has she done right or wrong? What should she do? Is it too late? And what does he think? Early on her son told her to leave him alone—

he had other things to do. Like his father, he never said clearly what he wanted from her.

He never told me, Mami, come back, or asked me why I've left. The only thing he told me was, Mom, I hope the past doesn't affect us. I don't like stories, he said. I like to focus always on the present. He's always very diplomatic—he may be dying of anger and he will tell you that it wasn't your fault, you didn't leave me because you didn't love me but because of the circumstances. But one time he did tell me: The only thing I would like is that my children don't have to suffer what I did. So I told him, son, the only thing you have to do is to hang tight to the idea that you can do your things in the place where you are—on the contrary it looks like this is a vicious cycle. Because I also grew up without my dad, I tell him, but I never thought he didn't care for me. That's all he's told me, he's never asked me why have you left me. One time he said he wanted to come here to study, but he hadn't finished high school yet. And when he turned 17 I asked him if he wanted to come to work. No, he said: In Ecuador it's bad but I can do fine. Of course he'll do fine! A 17-year old boy, and for the first time he was in love. But it was tough on him because his girlfriend did come here. But then he moved on—he told me that life has taught him that those who leave don't come back, so I'm not going to be waiting for her. He said THOSE so no need to say more.

Daniela left when her son was 8; he is used to his mother's absence, and he is not willing to discuss it. But he still finds ways to let her know he is angry—or diplomatically angry. Daniela has considered the possibility of bringing him over, even if, as she says, here she is in a legal limbo [en el limbo de las leyes]. Her son said no, and she thinks it is because he is too comfortable: "Why would I want to go slaughter myself if I have almost everything here?" He hints at his anger without saying he is angry, and she believes, again without saying it, that his life in Ecuador is

too easy. An unspoken deal has worked between them: her job has been to send money, his job to do well in school. But now he has dropped out of university, and it is unclear what is next.

It was like all one suffered here, and all he suffered on his own, it was worth nothing, sort of a worthless struggle. I'm slowly assimilating it, though, and I think the youth have the right to make mistakes, it's not that you can fix their life. Imagine that hadn't he quit he would have had his degree at 23. But no—this one rushed into other things . . . I don't know if the marriage was an excuse to drop out of school, or if it was loneliness. I haven't asked him. I was mad at him and wasn't willing to give him one more cent. Let him work, let him know what sacrifice is. He was always saying that he'd go back to school—I got tired. Let him see that life isn't easy. So he has to work, and his first job is something like Dunkin' Donuts, or Wendy's, cashier, working from 4 am to 2 pm and then also in the afternoon. His father said that he'd help him find another job—I said no. Let him learn what work is, let him stick to a schedule for once.

Emigrants leave their children to send money home, but the children do not always appreciate it or take advantage of it. Daniela's plan was to help her son get his college degree. But what was the point? Her work has been wasted: the more money she has sent, the less her son has done on his own. Her money has made his life too easy; he has not known effort or discipline. She stopped sending money for a while to let him know what work is—but soon she resumed. He has said he may go back to school, and she may find another way to help him: "Maybe I'll help him without him noticing—without putting cash in his hands."

Why does Daniela persist? On the one hand, her son's future—his education—is the reason why she has emigrated; sending money is the aim—without it migration

makes no sense. On the other hand, her son's future is less the reason for her leaving than the excuse; she did not leave to help her son—she is helping her son because she left. But reasons and excuses are impossible to tell apart—means and goals get mixed up. Daniela has sent money so she could stay away from home; the money bought her the right to stay away. Her son's education is now sinking, and with it her alibi. Her son is not part of her life anymore—he cannot even be her excuse. A sort of rhetorical disinheritance ensues: she redefines her son as completely different from her.

My son is completely opposite from me—his way of being, of thinking. He's passive, conventional. He's not one to say I'm going to get out of this, I'm going to do things my way but I'll do them, I'm going to climb up and not stay right there. He's kind of lazier, more complacent, kind of more soft. It's not that I don't understand him—I do. But maybe for us it was economic want that made us this way, maybe because we grew up with no privileges.

Daniela has not exactly rejected motherhood; it is rather that her son has been replaced by someone else. “There's something interesting here, look: I have only one son and I wasn't there for his adolescence, but here I've had three—and I've learned with them. In English or Spanish children are all alike; they all go through the same phases.” When she first arrived in the house on Long Island she met the youngest one, and the connection sparked right away.

And I become fond of the boy and the boy becomes fond of me—so here's an enormous problem: that when I leave it's not only him that will suffer, but me too. Because until he was six it was only the two of us. We spent all the time together, the two of us—he has had no interaction with his siblings because they were older and spent more time with their parents. He was only with me. Now for instance he just left for summer

camp, and two days before leaving he was hugging me, kissing me, saying good-bye, begging me to write him, promising that he would write me too. And he's already 12—he's already big and there's still this connection as if he were my son.

A few days before I talked to her for the last time the child had celebrated his bar-mitzvah. Once and again Daniela said how much she liked it—how special it had been: “It’s because before I felt guilty enjoying with another child whereas my son—now it’s like my son has grown up and that’s sort of behind.” Daniela has untied herself from her old son, and now she can enjoy her new son. It may not last very long—the boy is growing up quickly and she knows they are bound to split up. But her improbable prominence at the boy’s bar-mitzvah, the moment of fame amid this modern Jewish observance so alien to her—that she will not forget. Daniela has found her way to be a mother in the end, if of a different kind, and so far away.

How to understand Daniela’s emigrant trajectory? In Ecuador she could not find her way to be a woman, and then a mother. In the United States it seems that she did. The difference is that in Ecuador she was a woman and a mother; here she has worked as a woman and mother. Womanhood and motherhood have become her job. Now that she does not have to be a woman, she can be a woman (now that she does not have to cook, she can cook). Now that she does not have a son, she can be a mother. The difference between being a woman and a mother and working as one is central to Daniela’s emigrant life.

When she turned 12 and finished elementary school, her father tried to take her with him to the coast so she would cook for him and other people. She said no. “I’m not going to be your slave,” she told him, or that is how she reconstructs the dialogue now. The line, in fact, is an unlikely one; it seems to borrow too much from her later experience. Daniela had to come all this way to find the words she needed back then.

To tell her father that she was not going to be her slave, she had to become someone else's slave. Now that she is a slave, it is possible not to be a slave. Daniela did not want to be a slave in Ecuador—even if the only way out was to be a slave somewhere else.

Her life in the United States can be seen as an attempt to redraw her experience in Ecuador. Daniela's memories of Ecuador are set against her family—her father wanted her to cook, her brothers wanted her to marry. She tried to deviate from the narrow path she was expected to follow, and upon failing, she left. As she looks over her trajectory, however, something pulls her back: she looks at her father's example—the first one to leave—to trace back her steps. Not long ago she wrote to her father asking him to forgive her, and he wrote back that there was nothing to forgive; he has always thought, he told her, that women should not be restricted by what people say. And she feels that her brothers—so hostile in the past—now care for her and respect her. “If I was the black sheep,” she laughs, “now I've become less black.” Be it because she has been able to send money, be it because she has become invisible and taken her discontent far away, Daniela got accepted into the family. Now that she is no one she is also one of them—in looking for her future she found her past.

Daniela talks about her modern teachers, she describes her character Tecla as the modern-century girl, and she says that her bosses are modern Jews. And she also casts her youthful attitude in those terms: “I wanted to be sort of modern: to do everything upside down.” Her emigrant trajectory can be seen in light of this quest—from traditional Ecuador to modern United States. Domestic service, in fact, is often described as modern slavery—from unpaid slave in her house to “wage-slave” in someone else's house.

But this is not how Daniela is using the word “modern,” or not exactly. Daniela's understanding of modernity is less about content than form—an open form.

Modernity is the pursuit of the new and different. It is possible to encapsulate Daniela's emigrant trajectory in the transition from one form of slavery to another. But it is also possible to see it as an open-ended quest. Daniela wants to be modern—and that is what makes her modern. The costs may have been high, the future is still unclear, she may regret some of her decisions. And yet she feels she has got it—and she would do it again.¹⁴⁹

Last night I was telling my brother Saúl that if I were to be born again I would make more mistakes than I have. So there's nothing to regret. I would eat more ice cream and less beans. Because sometimes you think you're making the biggest mistakes—and it's not so bad. Well: All is good after time has passed. In the moment it's why, why, why. And afterward it wasn't that bad: I should have done more. What I would not want to ever repeat is to have children and not be with them. That I would not want to do again. That's one thing I've regretted all my life. Because you think you'll win and you end up losing. It's the only thing I would not do again. Maybe I should have

¹⁴⁹ I quote from Marshall Berman's (1984) response to Perry Anderson's critique of Berman's *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982): "I board a bus heading south toward Manhattan. Just behind me, a massive black woman gets on, bent under numerous parcels; I give her my seat. Just behind her, her fifteen-or-so-year-old daughter undulates up the aisle, radiant, stunning in the skin-tight pink pants she has just bought. The mother won't look, buries her head in her shopping bags. They continue an argument that has clearly been going on since they left the store. The daughter says that, after all, she bought this with her own money that she made working; the mother replies that if this is all she can think of to buy, she isn't grown up enough to be trusted with her own money or to be out working. 'Come on, Mama,' the girl says, turning herself around and turning the heads of everybody in the bus, 'look at that pink, ain't it beautiful, won't it be nice for spring?' It's January, and spring is a long way off. The mother still won't look, but after awhile she lifts her eyes slowly, then shakes her head. 'With that ass,' she says, 'you'll never get out of high school without a baby. And I ain't taking care of no more babies. You're my last baby.' The girl squeezes her mother's arm: 'Don't worry, Mama. We're modern. We know how to take care of ourselves.' The mother sighs, and addresses her packages: 'Modern? Just you take care you don't bring me no modern babies.' Soon I get off, feeling as happy and whole as the girl in the bus. Life is rough in the South Bronx, but the people aren't giving up: modernity is alive and well" (121). And then he adds: "[T]he people in the crowd are using and stretching their vital powers, their vision and brains and guts, to face and fight the horrors; many of the things they do, just to get through the day and night, reveal what Baudelaire called 'the heroism of modern life.' The faces in the crowd today may be different from those in Baudelaire's age; but the forces that propel them haven't changed since modern times began" (122).

stayed there, static. Maybe not. That's the only thing. The rest I would double it. Twice as much ice cream, I would eat. I would do more stupid things to have more to tell.

IV. Despedida [Good-Bye]

The last time we met it was January. Daniela and I share our birthday so Perla had a little celebration for us. Next day I stopped by the apartment and talked to Daniela for several hours, only two days before I had to leave Queens. Every time I had asked about her trip, she had told me that we would need a special meeting for that: “It’s something you can’t even remotely imagine,” she explained. She had showed me pictures and mentioned in passing the pain in her ankle, and some of the good and bad people she travelled with. But she had never told me the whole story. I had planned to ask her about it that last day, but other topics came up and there was no time. Now I was very late for several things I had to take care of before leaving, and I had to say good bye.

I announced I was leaving and thanked her very much for everything. She said that it had been a pleasure, even if she had done most of the talking: “You don’t talk much,” she gently complained. “It’s that you’re the one with good things to tell,” I defended myself. “I don’t know if they are so good,” she quickly shot back. I had unintentionally suggested that I was more interested in the story than I was in her. It was too late to step back: “I mean that for me all you tell me is interesting—as you know one day I’d like to write about these stories.” She took it well: “Then I still have to tell you the story of my trip.” I had waited so long for her to tell me about the trip and now I could not stay. “You’ve promised me that one,” I tried, “and next time I come to New York City I’d love it if you tell me about it.” She knew there was no next time: “It’s easier now—before it was difficult, I was more sensitive, sort of saying don’t play that waltz to me.”

I am already standing up and have my jacket on. For the next twenty minutes Daniela talks about the trip. She describes the night they were told to get off the van and run—it was some tropical place, there were mosquitoes, it was dark. As soon as she started running she got her foot stuck in a tree root and fell to the ground. “I crawled to the side for the rest of the people to run, and I felt such pain and couldn’t move anymore. And I started crying and stayed there without moving.” She had dislocated her ankle and would have to go on across several countries with an injury in her foot. Two of the men she travelled with carried her for an entire night—she never felt so bad. “Do you believe in empirical medicine?” I said I guessed I did, and she told me about the woman who put her ankle back in place with her hands. Soon I had to leave.

Daniela never told me the whole story of her trip and many other things. And she told me many things that I could not include here, and several things that were not fully consistent with what she had said other times. Biographical material is always incomplete and is always moving; the final picture is never final and always blurry. My attempts to interpret Daniela’s immigrant trajectory are overly schematic, my words overly definite. What will happen with her son in Ecuador? What will happen with the child on Long Island? Will Daniela go home? Her decisions and indecisions may push her in different directions. The questions are still open and her biographical answers are still looking for their path. This is one particular cut in one particular moment—one fleeting moment in emigrant life.

Two days after talking to Daniela for the last time I drove north back to Ithaca. It had been my last interview in Queens and it felt very much right that it was with her.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

MIGRANT(S)

The son of a Customs agent, Arturo Gómez knew the port since he was a child. On school vacations his father took him to the docks and introduced him to the job: to follow the cargo around the warehouses, to talk your way through the paperwork, to speed up clearance of the shipments. At 21 Arturo started working with his father, and soon his father was working for him. It was the 1970s in Ecuador; with oil-export dollars pouring into the country, imports were on the rise: business flourished at Guayaquil's Customs. Arturo married María Delia, they had two children, and through family connections they acquired their first house. Over the years they bought another house, and then the house at the beach for the weekends. Arturo had several people working for him, and he treated them well. His children were getting ready to follow in his steps, the third generation in the family engaged with international trade.

When I met Arturo he was 54 and living with his wife and daughter in Queens. He had just started working at a new place and offered to take me along: sweeping, mopping, and waxing the floors in Manhattan, four nights a week. At 4 am we had an hour for lunch; two or three nights into the job I watched Arturo—this was not his name on the job—and Carlos Padilla, also from Guayaquil, badly beat our ill-tempered boss at dominoes, and have much fun at his expense. A few nights later Arturo fell down on an escalator, was taken out in an ambulance, and almost got fired. The two moments drew the first draft of Arturo in my eyes. The dominoes game had revealed the old Arturo, the arrogance of the good times in Guayaquil. The fall brought his character back to New York City: the long nights of work under someone else's name, the heavy toll on his body, the precariousness of his undocumented life.

Soon I quit the job and started visiting Arturo at his house in Jackson Heights. Sometimes he had slept a few hours, sometimes he had worked another cleaning job in the morning and barely slept. The three chapters in Part 1 follow Arturo's sleep-deprived ramblings: nostalgic or bitter, frustrated or dreamy, perhaps depending on how tired he was. The title of Part 1 quotes him on life in New York City: "Some people don't know where you come from." In the beginning I took the phrase to express Arturo's sense of having lost his past. No one recognized or gave him credit for who he had been back home; once king in his world, he had become invisible. Yet the phrase also meant something else. If people do not know who you are, you do not have to play your part. When his social space in Guayaquil seemed to crumble, Arturo craved anonymity—to be on his own, not to depend on anyone but himself, to be far away. After eight years in Queens, this sort of lonely freedom has crushed his sense of direction. There is no frame of reference, Arturo rambles about the future, his plans have no feet on the ground.

Originally I thought I would write the three chapters in Part 2 around Julio Colarejo, mirroring the structure of Part 1. Julio's family would be present in the chapters in the same role as Arturo's wife or aunt, more as supporting cast than on their own terms. But then Perla—whom I had met before—married Julio, and I had to change the scheme. Perla was now part of Julio's family, but more clearly than Arturo's wife María Delia, she was an emigrant herself (her closest relative when she arrived in the United States was one of her brothers-in-law in California). And then Julio's sister, Daniela, was clearly too much on her own not to have her own chapter. That is why I ended pushing the material on Julio into one chapter so I could have Perla and Daniela lead chapters of their own.

Like Arturo, Julio rambled. Unlike Arturo, Julio had much free time, and that may be why his rambling was more articulate. Both men had suffered accidents on the

job, and both received workers' compensation benefits, but Arturo was still working as many hours as he could find, and Julio was not. The lower-back accident at the clinic where he worked, lifting and carrying patients around, had opened a void in Julio's life. After years of hard physical work, his body had said no more, and even though he was now an American citizen, it was unclear what to do. It was from this uncertain pause in his emigrant time that Julio told me about his proud days in Ecuador: the union at AZTRA, the Army, the book-selling business, socialism. Looking to bring some of that past back to life, looking to define his next moves, Julio told me about his adjustment to New York City: no wife, no daughter, no papers, no voice.

Although I did not know it when I met her, Perla was fighting deportation. Almost a year later, when we sat down for more formal interviews, she had married Julio and managed to regularize her legal status: her residence was not there yet, but the danger had passed and the papers were coming. We did two of these interviews at Starbucks. Few immigrants I interviewed would have felt comfortable talking about their life while drinking iced coffee in public; few were so eager to communicate what they had gone through. Perla's testimony glows with her last-minute victory. Her prayers were answered, she has been offered a new beginning. From this moment of heightened expectation her voice reconstructs life there and here: obstacles are overcome, the bad brings along the good, light is made out of darkness. Impersonal and administrative violence—the economic barriers back home, the immigration arrest and detention in Texas—is recoded into romance and destiny. A teacher of English in Ecuador, Perla dreams of learning the new language in New York City.

There is something right about focusing the last chapter on Daniela. Because she lives at the house where she works on Long Island, I got to see her very few times, and still fewer times by herself. But three long conversations sufficed to make me

want to write her chapter. She is the one I feel I know least, and she is the one I feel I understand best. My recreation of her voice is closer to her own voice than in the other cases. In describing her pursuits from the isolated village in Azuay province to the isolated village on Long Island, Daniela was aware of the twisted threads connecting her past and present—different jobs and different lifestyles, contradictory ideas of womanhood and motherhood. Back home she struggled to be accepted as a woman and mother without giving up her lofty ideals. On Long Island she has found that one way to keep your freedom is to surrender it.

I left Queens and got back to Ithaca in January 2009 with many pages of field notes and many hours of tape recording. Much of the material is biographical, going back to the emigrants' country of origin, the decision to leave, the arrival in the United States. But these data were not readily available. It was by spending time with the emigrants—getting mixed up in their life—that I gathered the biographical material (their answers but also and particularly my questions). Collected through participant observation, the material was raw, verging on bloody, almost alive. How could I turn it into chapters?

The first step was to translate everything from Spanish into English. But more importantly I had to translate very informal material into formal academic language. I had to turn relatively live material into relatively dead writing—chop it up into pieces, make it homogeneous and malleable, achieve analytical distance from it. The method I used was paraphrasing. Gradually, one round after another, I made analytical space between their voice and my voice, between their voice and sociology. Because it is slow and requires patience, analytical paraphrasing (as I call it) allowed me to generate distance without entirely losing touch with the original material. By and large the process was similar for the six chapters: to reorganize, translate, edit, paraphrase, paraphrase again, comment, and attempt to interpret the material.

Yet what does it mean to interpret the material? What does it mean to turn informal raw material into formal academic language? What did it mean to make the material more formal? The goal, to some extent, was to separate form and content. The point was not to cook and homogenize the material but to skin it and see the social form behind each particular narrative. Social forms can be many, but I understand them as contradictions: there is form because there is tension. Emigration, as discussed in the introduction, is rife with contradiction. Thus, as I see it, what unifies the cases presented in the chapters is my attempt to find the social forms of these lives, the contradictions underlying these migration experiences.¹⁵⁰

This final chapter seeks to take the analysis of the material one step further. Social forms are understood as contradictions. But what are the contradictions in these migrants' journeys? What are the tensions? What are the voices whispering over each other in their heads? I will divide this chapter into three sections, each one trying to offer an answer. Section I goes back to the ideas presented in the introduction: the tension between temporary and permanent migration seen as the tension between the migrants and their social surroundings. Section II attempts to make the distinction between social and historical contradictions, emphasizing the specific historical forces organizing and disorganizing these lives. Section III looks for an approach where the

¹⁵⁰ The study of social forms is associated with Simmel. For one thing, there is the distinction between content (the individual) and form (the interaction between individuals) as the basis for his understanding of sociology. Yet Simmel also refers to forms in the context of his broader distinction between form and life. Is form as the subject of sociological study (form as interaction) the same as form as the more or less permanent object that Simmel opposes to "life's eternal flux" ([1918] 1971: 376)? Here is one of the possible answers: "A basic dualism pervades the fundamental form of all sociation. The dualism consists in the fact that a relation, which is a fluctuating, constantly developing life-process, nevertheless receives a relatively stable external form. The sociological forms of reciprocal behavior, of unification, of presentation toward the outside, cannot follow, with any precise adaptation, the changes of their inside, that is, of the processes that occur in the individual in regard to the other. These two layers, relation and form, have different tempi of development; or it often is the nature of the external form not to develop properly at all" (Simmel [1908] 1971: 351). A form can be seen as a contradiction, then, because, more rigid and stable than its content, it is bound to conflict with it. But that is not all. A different if connected source of tension is the conflict between the generic and the individual; the impersonal and the personal. It does not seem impossible to suggest that social forms, sociology's subject matter, are contradictory, both in the sense of life/form and personal/impersonal conflicts.

sociological and historical imaginations make room for the individual biography: form and content coming together in the particular meaning of a particular life.

No migrant is the first migrant and yet they all are. The following sections revisit the empirical chapters with this tension in mind.

I. Sociology and History

What is the difference between past and present immigration? And which discipline—sociology or history—is to study what? Among the most influential accounts of the immigrant experience in the United States is historian Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* (1951). In fact, in the early 1950s, only historians wrote about immigration; sociology, closely associated with the study of immigration up to the 1920s, had turned its gaze elsewhere as the influx of new arrivals declined. Yet the attempt to accommodate millions of emigrant trajectories into one book forced Handlin to draw the European peasant as an ideal type; and in so doing the historian was not so different from the sociologist. Handlin's entire historical picture borrowed much from sociology—both from the classical ideas and the studies of immigration of the Chicago school.

In the last decades immigration has reentered the present, and sociology claimed back its subject. (If at some point sociology gave immigration to history, more or less recently history gave it back to sociology.) In this back and forth the two disciplines influenced one another. With the publication of *The Uprooted* and ever after, the history of immigration began looking sociological. Conversely, recent sociology looks at recent immigration through the lens of the past. Much of the new scholarship centers on whether present immigration follows the tracks of past immigration—and this is problematic. For one thing, immigrants today are different from the old immigrants, and much more drastically so is the United States different from what it used to be. Yet what most distinguishes the old and new immigration is

precisely that one is old and the other is new. The old immigration is over: we more or less know how it began and how it ended; the immigrants are long dead. The new immigration, on the other hand, is alive; we might know how it began but not what it will become. Thoroughly screwed to the past, however, the sociology of immigration watches its subject develop as though it had watched it before.

The weight of the historical experience is particularly heavy on the problem of temporary versus permanent migration. Many of the old emigrants conceived of their journeys as temporary, and many of them ended up staying in America. Yet the tension between permanent and temporary migration has little presence in the retrospective look at European emigration. Given that so many stayed, historians are not interested in whether staying was their original intent and how it was that they eventually changed their mind; historically, the case is closed. The present, on the other hand, is still open-ended: the tension between temporary and permanent is still palpable, the doors are still open. Yet current sociology of immigration echoes the retrospective silence and proceeds as though the end was known. Like their forerunners one century ago, migrants can dream of return but most will end up staying. In teleological fashion, so to speak, the future of immigration is mirrored in the past.¹⁵¹

My dissertation tries to put the historical American immigration experience aside and examine the present more openly. I take a particular moment in emigrant

¹⁵¹ When reading Thomas's *Old World Traits Transplanted* (1921) the present reader is not surprised by the main arguments (these are the arguments that the Chicago School lent to history and history lent to current sociology—the arguments have not changed). What is surprising is how alive the material is: as the authors bring native categories into the analysis, the reader can actually hear the immigrants and feel the tension in their life. The history of immigration, in turn, has changed since the 1950s. Compared with *Old World Traits Transplanted*, Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* was "far more monochromatic" (Kivisto 1990: 467), but both 1950s historians and their sociological predecessors shared "a teleological view that the second and subsequent generations would continue to assimilate into the American mainstream" (467). The new social history of immigration has moved in another direction: "[N]umerous scholars have implicitly or explicitly called into question the teleological cast of assimilation theory sharing Yinger's (1985: 173) sentiments as he observes, 'if one assumes that assimilation is inevitable and desirable, important questions are not even asked'" (Kivisto 1990: 469).

life. I attempt not to drown its uncertainty in the certainty of the past. Immigrants are not here to stay—that is what many of them say, that was not their original plan. Will they ever return to their countries? What are the conditions for emigrants to go back? Why does return seem so difficult? Why is it continually put off? Why and how does temporary migration threaten to become permanent? Much of the material discussed in the dissertation—more abstractly in the introduction, more concretely in the chapters—addresses these questions. History recounts what ended up happening. Sociology should do something else. From the decision to leave to the non-decision to stay—how should sociology theorize migration?

In the background of European emigration there were vast economic transformations, and it is not different today. Migrants come from disorder. They leave because something changes: upward or downward mobility, emerging aspirations or vanishing possibilities. There is, however, an order to the disorder; it is contained by the existing social hierarchy. People are anxious to climb up or not fall down across the social space they know. Things are loose enough for movement to be imaginable, but the more or less familiar map is still visible, or actually more visible than ever before: prospective emigrants see themselves on the map. There is change and disorder; in the old Chicago sociology language, social life has disorganized. Yet the space where migrants decide to leave is still socially dense; and it likely feels denser as prospective emigrants ponder about their social position and how it could change.

In order to move across society, emigrants step outside of society; this is the sociological crux of emigration. The country of origin is known territory; migrants are painfully aware of the context they are temporarily leaving behind. The receiving society, on the other hand, is not socially empty, but it may feel as if it is; social density drops, migrants feel lonely and free. Three conditions associated with emigration blur the migrant's sense of orientation. Leaving itself isolates migrants

from their world, redefining family and other links. Falling crushes their frame of reference—migrants often work the jobs on the lowest rungs of the labor market; their social position begins to get diluted. Hiding—when the migrant is undocumented—amounts to living in the quicksand of American immigration policy and law. Time goes by and emigrants begin to get lost. To leave the sending country was a major decision. To remain in the receiving country is a non-decision. In the emigrant social void decisions are hard to make.¹⁵²

What kind of theory is this? What kind of language? Much of sociological theory lies somewhere beneath the shadows of Durkheim's typology of suicide and Weber's typology of social action. Durkheim's types, in fact, are also types of action, though suicide is more of an anti-action, to say the least. Indeed, Durkheim focused his typology on suicide—the action that ends all action—to emphasize how fragile we are in the hands of society (too much or too little society and we are in danger). Emigration is not suicide, but the decision to leave can also be seen as an unbalance or fracture between emigrant and society. Echoing the most famous type of suicide, what could be called anomic emigration can also be traced back to economic disorder: expectations, limitations, restlessness, dissatisfaction.¹⁵³

¹⁵² The void metaphor brings to mind Marc Augé's *Non-places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* ([1992] 2006). It should be said, with Augé, that the distinction between social density and social void, like Augé's distinction between place and non-place, is an analytical one: "At this point, however, we should remind ourselves that there are no 'non-places' in the absolute sense of the term. I have defined an 'anthropological place' as any space in which inscription of the social bond (for example, places where strict rules of residence are imposed on everyone) or collective history (for example, places of worship) can be seen. Such inscriptions are obviously less numerous in spaces bearing the stamp of the ephemeral and the transient. That does not mean, however, that either place or non-place really exists in the absolute sense of the term. The place/non-place pairing is an instrument for measuring the degree of sociality and symbolization of a given place" (viii). Augé's most characteristic non-places are airports, lounges, highways, hotels, supermarkets, malls: these are not, of course, the characteristic sites of emigrant life. There are some connections but also differences between "sociological void" and anthropological non-place.

¹⁵³ Durkheim ([1897] 1979) presented four main types of suicide: 1) egoistic; 2) altruistic; 3) anomic; and the less discussed 4) fatalistic. Following this typology, it is possible to think of four types of emigration. The *egoistic* emigrant is the product of excessive individualism: "The more weakened the groups to which he belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognizes no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his private interests . . . So far as they are the admitted masters of their destinies, it is their privilege to end their lives [in the home

Once the migrant is in the receiving country, however, Durkheim's typology does not seem to work. Explaining what happens after emigration is like explaining what happens after suicide: not much. Society has been left behind—sociology has little to say.¹⁵⁴ Migrants can be said to move between two types of anomie. Back home there is change and disorder, but life stays within everyone's social imagination: positions are changing, people circulate, but the ladder is more or less clear. In the emigrant wilderness anomie is of an entirely different kind: the map has been lost—movement is not up and down: migrants spin around with no sense of direction. In Durkheim's typology there might well be a threshold after which anomie is not anomie anymore—a point after which even suicide would be too much to expect.

What kind of decision is leaving? Weber's typology of social action examines what (meaningful) individual action is based upon: analysis, values, emotions,

country]" (209). These are emigrants who leave because they have no one to stop them from leaving. The *altruistic* emigrant is the product of not enough individualism: "Now, when a person [emigrates], in all these cases, it is not because he assumes the right to do so but, on the contrary, *because it is his duty*. If he fails in this obligation, he is dishonored and also punished . . . [We] have seen that if such a person insists on [staying] he loses public respect . . . The weight of society is thus brought to bear on him to lead him [away]" (219). These are the emigrants who leave to save face; when the social position back home has been threatened, for instance, or following any potentially embarrassing circumstances, or even out of an exacting sense of "personal" dignity. Anomic suicide is the type most characteristic of modern times, and so is *anomic* emigration. Here the question is not too little or too much attachment to society, but too little regulation of life (or too much in the case of fatalistic emigration). Anomic emigration originates from the expectations associated with economic modernization, where material progress becomes possible and impossible at once: "[The] state of crisis and anomy is constant and, so to speak, normal. From top to bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it, since its goal is far beyond all it can attain. Reality seems valueless by comparison with the dreams of fevered imaginations; reality is therefore abandoned, but so too is possibility abandoned when it in turn becomes a reality. A thirst arises for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations" (256). Anomic emigration is the product of economic change and its uprooting consequences. Finally, the *fatalistic* emigrant is the one fleeing an oppressive environment: no other type makes the connection between migration and the quest for freedom more explicit. These *Suicide*-inspired types of emigration can be useful to examine where migrants come from—sociologically.

¹⁵⁴ Of course this is an exaggeration: emigration is not suicide. Yet Durkheim's typology of suicide is less about suicide than about the relationship between individual and society. The fact remains that sociology seems to have little to say when society is far away. The emigrant world is not exactly socially empty, and is not exactly an anthropological non-space—but sociology is in trouble anyway. As Augé puts it: "As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality. Try to imagine a Durkheimian analysis of a transit lounge at [the Paris airport] Roissy!" ([1992] 2006: 76).

tradition. To emigrate can be seen as all four types of action or combinations of them. Insofar as leaving requires an important decision, though, it is difficult to picture it as irrational (meaning, in Weber's typology, that emotion or tradition are the key components). One way or another migrants know what they are doing; the decision may be based on a cost-benefit analysis or some conviction about who they are and want to be or both—whatever the case, emigrants have thought it through. But what happens in the receiving country? Staying, unlike leaving, does not have to be an important decision; it can be a non-decision. Emigrants can drag along year after year without ever deciding either to stay or to go. Can staying be seen as meaningful action at all?¹⁵⁵

The classic language of sociology, it seems, finds it easier to capture the decision to leave than the non-decision to stay. Once migrants have stepped out of the social structure where they belonged, Durkheim's language loses its grip. And how can Weber's typology of meaningful action account for the absence of meaningful action? This echoes the old quip that sociology was born to bid farewell to society. Sociology has long been concerned with transitions, long struggling to explain the future in the language of the past. It is no wonder that the emigrant experience echoes

¹⁵⁵ Weber writes in chapter one of *Economy and Society* ([1922] 1978): "The line between meaningful action and merely reactive behavior to which no subjective meaning is attached, cannot be sharply drawn. A very considerable part of all sociologically relevant behavior, especially purely traditional behavior, is marginal between the two" (4-5). Staying in the receiving country, however, can hardly be seen as traditional behavior. "In the case of some psychophysical processes, meaningful, i.e., subjectively understandable, action is not to be found at all; in others it is discernible only by the psychologist. Many mystical experiences which cannot be adequately communicated in words are, for a person who is not susceptible to such experiences, not fully understandable" (5). Staying in the receiving country, however, is not what one would think of as a psychophysical process or a mystical experience. "In the great majority of cases actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness of its subjective meaning. The actor is more likely to 'be aware' of it in a vague sense than he is to 'know' what he is doing or be explicitly conscious about it. In most cases his action is governed by impulse or habit" (21). If this is the case with what the individual does do, what can be expected of what she or he does not do? Can the subjective meaning of staying—not returning—be sociologically understood? Social action, as Weber defines the concept, does include "omission" (4) and the "failure to act" (22). But staying in the receiving country is not easy to see even as the failure to return home; staying does not happen at one particular moment; it is endlessly spread over time, and that may be why it is difficult to reconstruct its subjective meaning.

this sort of gap. Emigrating is more or less tantamount to jumping off into the unknown: no matter how thoughtful the decision, the last minute requires migrants to close their eyes. Migrants know what they are doing—and yet the decision to leave has been termed in the language they are leaving behind. As they step outside their social world, the decision—emigration itself—begins losing its contours; things become difficult to explain.

This is not the only way of looking at emigration. What about institutions? What about family and gender roles? What about immigrant communities or ethnic enclaves? And what about transnational ties? In brief: What about all the kind of material—the social forces—that make up the bulk of the sociological enterprise? The point is not to deny any of that but to stress the relative change. Emigrants are not completely lonely, of course—they are lonelier than they were back home. And sociology has always had trouble dealing with loneliness. On the one hand, loneliness is at the core of classical sociology (it dominates the concepts of organic solidarity and instrumental action, not to mention alienation or anomie). On the other hand, loneliness, as the most blatant negation of society, is difficult to study sociologically. What to say from the perspective of society when society seems to be (relatively) gone?¹⁵⁶

Picture Arturo back in Guayaquil. Everyone knows him, everyone expects something from him: his customers, the state officials working at Customs, his own employees both at home and his office, his relatives, his wife and her relatives, his children. His money in the bank suddenly gone, Arturo is trapped. Business and family, connections and employees—the whole chain collapses around his neck. Arturo buys a plane ticket and leaves for New York City. The last moment is difficult.

¹⁵⁶ This is the last sentence in Augé's book about non-places: "So there will soon be a need—perhaps there already is a need—for something that may seem a contradiction in terms: an ethnology of solitude" ([1992] 2006: 98).

There is something unreasonable about leaving, the decision seems too abrupt; his family does not understand. Yet he knows what he is doing. He will not stay to watch himself go down. He will not wait. An entire chunk of the Guayaquilean social hierarchy is falling upon his head—he still has two arms, he tells himself, and he must leave now.

Julio's wife is young and ambitious, and she wants to leave for the United States. Julio is not sure. Unlike Arturo, he has no tourist visa; the trip is far more complicated. He is also very attached to his daughter, and his book-selling business is not doing badly. And yet the deal seems too good to miss—everyone tells them that in New York City you can make money easily—and he cannot stop his wife. Arturo leaves Guayaquil because too many doors seem to be closing on him. Julio leaves Cuenca because doors have been opening up. It has already been a long journey since he walked out of his father's house: the union at the sugar mill, the Army, the socialist friends, most of them educated professionals, as he would say. Then the prosperous book business, the working of his networks, shrewd market psychology and natural leadership skills. The arc has been long: Why not push further? Why not New York City?

Both Perla and Daniela are the first ones in their families to attend college. Both have struggled their way to teaching. Perla has moved from the suburbs of Quito into the center of town. Daniela has moved from her home village to the city of Cuenca. Both have crossed boundaries and both have run into barriers. The opportunity to leave finds them at the right moment. Perla has suffered from the financial crisis in the 1990s—she and her family are in debt. Daniela had some of her savings stolen and is frustrated. Both have been doing reasonably well, both are reasonably proud of their accomplishments. The final decision looks different. Daniela is leaving her child—the decision is almost blind, instinctive; she knows what she is

doing and she does not. Perla is putting an unhappy love story behind—she needs a change of atmosphere, she is ready to leave.

Arturo and Perla enter the United States on tourist visas. Julio uses someone else's visa. Daniela walks into Arizona. No one is thinking of staying long. They have no papers, they are leaving families and careers behind. Two, three, four years of work—save money, breathe fresh air, try something new: then get back. When I meet them many years later, they are still talking about return. After some 12 years in the country Julio managed to regularize his status through marriage, and so did Perla when she married him, after nearly getting deported. Arturo and family—wife and daughter—are still undocumented, and so is Daniela. Arturo follows the news about immigration reform, hopefully. Daniela does not. They all know it is getting late. Will they ever go back?

Their backgrounds in Ecuador are very different, but Arturo's and Julio's adjustment to emigrant life has much in common. It is not so much that they are relatively new to the jobs at the bottom. It is more that their carefully crafted sense of social position cannot survive in the new context. Now they are one among many, one more in the undistinguishable mass. They do not know what to do with their past, and they must learn to shut up. Arturo learns that no one cares about the company he used to own, and that no one needs to know that he has no papers; honesty is not appreciated—no one wants to know anything at all. Julio learns that talking does not work the way it used to; it is not only that he does not speak English—language is not part of the emigrant underworld. Their injured bodies speak to what emigration is about: hard physical work. With no job, Julio spends his days trying to figure out what is next. Still working as much as possible, Arturo has little time to make plans.

Perla gets out of the immigration detention center in Texas and rides the bus back to New York City. Her belongings have been stolen, her deportation case

proceeds slowly but without stop. After almost eight years working in the United States, she is about to go home with nothing to show for it—no husband, no money, not one of the electronic gadgets she has piled up. About a year after leaving detention, she marries Julio in City Hall; her deportation proceedings are canceled and she is on her way to legal residency. To regularize one's status is the moving target undocumented immigrants keep shooting for. The point is not so much that they need to hide—things would be clearer that way. The point is that they are always about to stop hiding—there always seems to be an opportunity, only if you were bold, clever, and lucky enough. The possibility pushes them through the years. When it actually happens, as in Perla's case, it is as though everything started all over. Perla, to put it mildly, is born again.

Why has Daniela stayed in the United States so long? She has never run into immigration enforcement, and she has never given much thought to the possibility of regularizing her legal status. Like her brother Julio, she had to learn to live in the new context—she had to learn to shut up when dealing with her bosses before she could learn to talk back to them. She had, of course, to see herself differently, she had to create distance, she had to let time go by—and in the meantime she had to somehow turn her brain off. There are blind spots when reconstructing time. When she finally reawakened, as she puts it, Daniela was someone else; she was finally away from her life in Ecuador: her family and her son. Daniela struggled to redefine herself independently from her family; she struggled to be alone. Nothing would be easier in the United States, where they pay her to be alone. No one will pay her to be alone back in Ecuador. After so many years, no one is waiting for her.

These quick snippets from the previous chapters attempt to bring data and theory closer together. (I do not see the cases as either evidence or illustration—to paraphrase von Clausewitz one more time, data is the continuation of theory by other

means; data and theory cannot be told apart.) I use the present tense because this is not history but sociology. I am not interested in what happened in these particular cases but in making out some of the social forms. Can the trajectories briefly recalled be rendered into more or less clear-cut sociological moments? When paraphrasing the moment migrants decide to leave, it seems more or less clear that the so-called social structure is—like a moving labyrinth—closing off some paths and opening up others, not too subtly nudging emigrants out. Once the migrants are out of the labyrinth, in contrast, the sociological tentacles seem to lose power, the sociological headlights seem to dim down—emigrant life is slippery: it slips away from sociological types.

What can sociology say about emigrant life? What might a sociology of emigrant waiting look like? There is waiting for something and waiting for nothing. There is active waiting (when you purposely kill time, for instance) and passive waiting (when you simply wait, or when you do not know you are waiting and there is no time-keeping). There is more or less anxious waiting. Immigrant waiting can take on several if not all of these forms. Yet what makes emigrant waiting distinct is the combination of relatively clear ends (emigrants are waiting for something: to go home) and relatively unclear means (emigrants do not know they are waiting—they are not keeping time). It is more complicated, of course. Ends and means easily get mixed up. At some point emigrants knew what they wanted, and they set out to look for it. But that was some time ago. They now wait without waiting. There is something they want, and they do not know what it is. There is something they want, and there is no timetable attached.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Anthropology has paid more attention than sociology to waiting. Naoki Nasuga's (2005) study of "freeters" in Japan (young people who neither work nor study and somehow seem to have dropped out of the system) reviews several ethnographies about "people who wait" and distinguishes between three types of waiting (5-6): 1) The first type can be seen in the waiting for an annual pay raise, year after year, and the waiting of several decades for the mortgage to be paid off—it is the waiting of "scrupulous people who like to plan"; 2) The second type of waiting is that of a gambler in a casino—it is the waiting of "brokers, dealers and investors who dream of quick money"; 3) The third type of waiting is exemplified by García Márquez's retired colonel who goes to the post office every Friday "to

Loic Wacquant begins his exploration of boxing by quoting Goffman in *Asylums* (1962): “Any group of persons—prisoners, primitives, pilots, or patients—develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it” (quoted in Wacquant 2004: 2). Urban ethnography has long aimed at making sense of what does not seem to make sense from the outside. The sociology of immigration faces the opposite challenge. So much part of the historical experience, so embedded in the narrative about national identity, immigration makes sense; it may take shorter or longer, there might be more or less suffering, it can get worse before it gets better, but immigration—History tells us—is doomed to make sense. That is why in the field of immigration Goffman’s dictum must be reversed. As the researcher gets close to the people, as one sinks oneself down into the twists and turns of emigrant

collect the letter with details of his pension which will never arrive”—this is waiting that cannot be fulfilled. Nasuga writes: “The three types of ‘waiting’ presented above each differ in the stakes wagered for the fulfillment of desire and in the possibilities of realization. Nevertheless, we get the feeling in all three that the characters sincerely confront reality to achieve their dreams” (7). Freeters, on the other hand, do not seem to be doing their best “to materialize their wishes . . . We cannot see how they face the harsh realities that stand in their way and overcome them, or are overtaken by them” (7). The waiting of emigrants can be seen in all these types. They patiently wait to save money to go home, even when they know it will take decades. They gamble—migration itself is a gamble—and dream of making quick money. Like García Márquez’s colonel, they keep doing what they are doing, even when everything suggests that there is no connection between what they do (going to the post office) and what they are waiting for (getting the letter). Finally, not unlike freeters, emigrants seem to have lost touch with what they are waiting for (the difference may be that emigrants, at some point, did know what they wanted, or so they thought). “If one came here it’s for something,” I have heard immigrants say, suggesting both that there is a purpose and that they no longer know what it is. A recent volume on *Waiting* edited by anthropologist Ghassan Hage (2009) includes an article on “Waiting to Return Home: Modes of Immigrant Waiting” by Salim Lakha. Based on two other contributions in the volume, the author contrasts two models: 1) immigrant waiting implies “strong and purposive action that can be equated with characteristics of hunting such as being observant, following a prey and taking by surprise” (121-2); 2) immigrant waiting is “akin to a holding action or a lingering and can even precipitate a state of paralysis when it assumes an extreme state”; in this view waiting gives rise to “feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability” (122). Based on ethnographic fieldwork with Indian immigrants in Britain and Australia, Lakha concludes: “Though such sentiments may arise in specific groups or individuals under exceptional circumstances, it is not the case with the migrants in my study who are waiting to return home. Their waiting is not marked by paralysis or resigned acceptance of their existing condition, but on the contrary involves engaging actively with their present circumstances while they are waiting to return home” (122). The author emphasizes “modes [of engaging with the present] that could be said to represent resistance,” such as “the desire to retain citizenship of their homeland, opposition to going down to the pub as well as consuming specific foods, and rejection of the idea of settling permanently in the adopted homeland” (122). Goffman begins “Where the Action Is” (1967) by quoting tightrope artist Karl Wallenda: “To be on the wire is life; the rest is waiting.”

life—the doubts, the confusion, the uncertainty, the silences, the clichés—it turns out that not just any group of persons, or not in all circumstances, develop a life of their own that can be described as meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close it. Meaningless, so to speak, can become the new meaningful; unreasonable the new reasonable; abnormal the new normal.

Sociology can more or less explain why migrants leave. With much more effort, sociology can try to explain why it becomes difficult for them to return. But to which emigrants do these models apply? How universal or specific are they? In Guenther Roth's authoritative words, "Sociologists live, and suffer, from their dual task: to develop generalizations and to explain particular cases. This is the *raison d'être* of sociology as well as its inherent tension" ([1968] 1978: XXXVII). This section tried to put the heavy history of the American immigration experience behind. The next section brings Ecuadorian history in as I zoom in on the cases, moving from sociological to historical types.

II. History and Biography

When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a business man. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father.

C. Wright Mills [1959] 1978: 3

These handsome lines will be easily recognized; they come from "The Promise," the famous first chapter of *The Sociological Imagination*. "The facts of contemporary history are also the facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women," C. Wright Mills begins the paragraph. "Neither the life of an individual nor

the history of a society can be understood without understanding both,” the last sentence reads. “The Promise” is one of the most popular texts to introduce sociology to students: it promises that sociology has something to say about their life; it promises that they are not alone—for better or worse they are part of history, or history is part of them, and the sociological imagination can show them how.

Yet this initial promise proves difficult to fulfill; much of sociology is about something else. History is present in classical sociology, but it takes on another scale: not the particular crises or wars of contemporary history but much vaster historical processes. Scale is not the main difference between the sociological promise and classical sociology. In C. Wright Mills’s formulation, individual biography and social history interact: war knocks on the door, a salesman becomes a rocket launcher, history changes his life. No similar encounter will be found in the language of classical sociology. C. Wright Mills promised to reveal the secret connections between biography and history. Sociological types are biography and history meshed into one. Sociology does not have room for the individual as different from history. There is no store clerk to become a radar man. Biography and history melt together under the radiance of the conceptual type.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Durkheim’s types, even when they concern individual action, like the suicide types, are never about individual action. As *The Rules of Sociological Method* ([1895] 1982) makes clear, sociology studies social facts: “Here, then, is a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him” (52). Durkheim distinguishes between the social facts and their individual “incarnations” (54): “As regards their private manifestations, these do indeed have something social about them, since in part they reproduce the collective model. But to a large extent each one depends also upon the psychical and organic constitution of the individual, and on the particular circumstances in which he is placed. Therefore they are not phenomena which are in the strict sense sociological. They depend on both domains at the same time, and could be termed socio-psychical. They are of interest to the sociologist without constituting the immediate content of sociology” (55-6). Weber’s individualism, in turn, is methodological; individual cases are turned into ideal types. As stated in “Objectivity” in *Social Science and Social Policy* ([1904] 1949): “An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct (90).” Both Durkheim and Weber acknowledge that there is individual life beyond social facts and ideal types, even though individual life is not what sociology studies. (Durkheim’s lack of interest in the individual, however, is not only a matter of defining the boundaries of sociology as a

In the previous section it was necessary to put aside the heavy history of American immigration for sociology to breathe free. In this section it is necessary to do the opposite; sociology must be put aside so the particular history of Ecuadorian emigration does not slip out of the picture. How are the cases presented in the preceding chapters historical products? War turns an insurance salesman into a rocket launcher and a store clerk into a radar man. How has history shaped these emigrant biographies? What has it done to them? Behind every migrant is history, but what does history mean? There is a generational element: birth dates matter. There is much more: not every store clerk becomes a radar man. History does not impact everyone, or not all history, or not in the same way. How has Ecuadorian history weighed on Ecuadorian emigration?

The most popular word to talk about Ecuador is diversity. Travel guides picture colonial towns in the Andes, fishing villages by the sea, exuberant Amazonian jungles. Sociological guides picture an intricate mosaic of ethnic and class layers, an array far more complicated than the complicated geography itself. Ecuadorian emigration is also diverse. The history of emigration to the United States goes back to 1950s and 1960s, when Ecuadorians from both the Pacific coast and the Southern highlands found their way to New York City. The former stream was linked to maritime trade based in Guayaquil, the latter to the Panama-hat export business in the

discipline. In "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions," Durkheim ([1914] 1960) starts off from the fact that man has always and everywhere conceived of himself "as being formed of two radically heterogeneous beings: the body and the soul" (326). So universal and permanent a belief cannot be "purely illusory," says Durkheim, and sets to explain where this duality comes from (326). The answer is based on the distinction between the sacred and the profane. "It is not without reason, therefore, that man feels himself to be double: he actually is double. There are in him two classes of states of consciousness that differ from each other in origin and nature, and in the ends toward which they aim. One class merely expresses our organisms and the objects to which they are most directly related . . . The states of consciousness of the other class, on the contrary, come to us from society; they transfer society into us and connect us with something that surpasses us" (337). The body is one state of consciousness (associated with the profane) and the soul is another (associated with the sacred); the body expresses our individual organism; the soul comes to us from society. The only element of "individuality" Durkheim recognizes in the individual is the body; everything else is transferred into us from society.)

Azuay and Cañar provinces. Yet the contrast between coast and highlands barely scratches the surface of the Ecuadorian ménage: rural and urban origin, men and women, type of occupation and economic background, upward and downward trajectory—they all run through Ecuadorians in New York City.

The social science literature on Ecuadorian emigration has largely focused on migrants of rural background from the Southern highlands residing in the United States, mostly the New York City area. In the last ten years or so, however, after the 1999 financial crisis, much attention has veered toward the so-called new emigration, mostly of urban origin and destined to Spain, more clearly linked to the middle-class and including many more women than in the past. The cases I have explored both reinforce and challenge this analytical dichotomy. On the one hand, my cases can be seen as part of the new emigration: they have urban and more or less middle-class background, there are both men and women, and the late 1990s financial crisis weighed heavily on some of them. On the other hand, they are in the United States and not Spain; and more importantly, migration in some if not all of these cases can be traced back to the past, with either domestic or overseas migration being part of the family history. What seems to be new may not be so new: the late 1990s financial crisis may have provided the last push, but Ecuadorian emigration had been in the making long before.

Arturo Gómez's uncle, an accountant in Ecuador, travelled to the United States in 1956 and soon died in Manhattan; a car hit him as he walked out of work in 1957 or 1958. Arturo's father, a Customs agent at the Guayaquil port, was more exposed than his brother to the outside world, but he never thought of leaving his native town. Guayaquil was in the middle between Ecuador and the world, and Customs was in the middle of the middle; at the crossroads of international trade, the location was moderately profitable and relatively safe. Arturo was born in 1954; his father led the

sort of 1950s and 1960s prosperous life that allowed him to indulge in his preferences—music, tobacco, leisure—without ever going too far. When Arturo himself started working as an agent in the early 1970s, the sharp increase in oil production and exports was about to bring along drastic change—contemporary history was pulling the strings; business grew rapidly, opportunities opened up.

Guayaquil is one of only four Latin American cities with higher population than their country's capital (the other three are in Brazil). A sometime booming port, Guayaquil has a long rivalry with Quito: economic and political power struggling over the control of the nation, even as they have often colluded. A Customs agent in the Guayaquil port is at the heart of this historical tension; regional conflict is central to his daily life. For one thing, an agent's job is to ease the interaction between international traders and government officials: he is the hinge between market and state. Additionally, in Guayaquil, an agent is located between the local and federal governments (like elsewhere, Customs administration is under federal jurisdiction, so it is not directed from Guayaquil but from Quito). More generally, an agent is a window to the outside world: the circulation of merchandise cannot be told apart from the circulation of identities and lifestyles. Historically, in sum, Customs agents in Guayaquil are the ultimate middlemen.

A series of banking crises during the 1990s steadily undermined the ground Arturo was standing on. The 1970s boom in foreign trade had made it possible to rise considerably above his father. His connections with state officials had helped him, and he had helped his connections. Arturo had built his little kingdom: in addition to business he was in the middle of several circuits of employees and relatives, and one way or another everyone was part of the same web. Why things collapsed is not exactly clear. International trade did not decline in the 1990s—quite the contrary. Arturo's personalized business style, however, was too rooted in the past. Growth had

benefited him; too much growth could harm him. The Customs administration was more or less modernized; some of the old informal ways were bureaucratized; political changes brought in new people: Arturo's business was too based on carefully crafted personal connections to survive impersonal change. Guayaquil was large, his circle was small and tight. In leaving for New York City Arturo betted on distance, again: with distance comes trade. Yet the distance between New York City and Guayaquil is not what it used to be. Many more Ecuadorians are abroad than in the past, and the economy in Ecuador has recovered after touching bottom early in the decade. Dollarization has also shortened the distance—the American dollar, now Ecuador's official currency, has lost the power it used to have.

Like Guayaquil, Cuenca is not Ecuador's capital city; unlike Guayaquil, Cuenca is up in the highlands, not on the coast. Cuenca is the transportation and commercial hub for dozens of rural villages in the surrounding countryside. Julio and Daniela were born in one such village, Julio in 1957, Daniela in 1962. In line with the area's colonial legacy, the family tree registers priests and nuns, landowners and generals. Some of the family branches had retained some power and wealth, but Julio's and Daniela's father was on the unfortunate side. While still a boy—around 1940—he left the village for the Ecuadorian Amazon: “Back then going to the Oriente was like going to the United States now,” his daughter tells me in Queens. Eventually he came back to get married, but his migrant destiny was sealed from early on. Internal movement, in fact, organized the middle decades of the Ecuadorian twentieth century: from the rural highlands to the Amazon, seen as the virgin land of opportunity, but more commonly to the city of Quito, and much more commonly to the more prosperous and faster-paced coast.

Julio was not the eldest son, but he would be the first one to leave. Like his father some thirty years earlier, it took several years for him to come back. Like his

father, he soon left again and settled more or less permanently on the coast. The times, however, contemporary history, were different now. The 1970s military government combined expansive fiscal policy with authoritarian rule, and the result was vast popular unrest. Julio's career in organized labor at the largest sugar mill in Ecuador speaks to his skills and charisma, but also to an active labor movement. When Ecuador went to war with Peru in 1981, Julio did not become a rocket launcher, but he did have his share of Army experience. The language of class he had learned at the sugar mill turned to the language of nation—his vocabulary expanded from socialism to nationalism. A few years later he was established in Cuenca and sold books: dictionaries, encyclopedias, technical books. His linguistic adventures may have been over, but Julio still believed in language; the book business displayed an even more utopian faith in education, progress, and language than socialism and nationalism before.

Not many women in Cuenca played soccer back then; not many finished high school and went on to college; not many dreamed of working at NASA. Daniela was the first daughter in the family, and among the first women to try out several new territories. Contemporary history, once again, would make it both possible and impossible. A teenager in the 1970s, Daniela's memories of General Rodríguez Lara are two-fold: the not-so-bad-quality backpacks the President handed out to all students in the country; the protests against his repressive government on the streets. Education was more available than ever before; rebellion was in the air. Daniela tried to walk the line between the past—her more or less traditional family—and the future: education, protest, independence. After much struggle, she gave up; balance was impossible to strike. Or was it history that gave up? The general expansion in educational possibilities suffered from the much more restrictive fiscal climate in the 1980s and

beyond. When Daniela left for the United States in 1995, teachers had been on strike for several months.

Perla and Daniela are almost the same age, and their historical trajectories share much: education is the possibility to move up; love stories fail to evolve into families; they move back and forth between independence and their own family; they combine teaching and sales. The three of them—Julio, Daniela, Perla—embody one particular kind of historical trajectory: they climb up a ladder that is sinking down; their life moves upward, but they are moving up a world that is moving down. The more they climb, the more they are staking their fate on a vanishing world. They took it on the road and followed the road until the end—and then there was not much at the end. Leaving for the United States is both historical continuity and historical interruption: it is the last step of an upward road—there is continuity between their pursuit of progress and modernity and the lights of New York City; and it is also interruption: leaving speaks to their final if more or less veiled realization that the upward road goes nowhere.

One way or another all of them—the Gómez on the coast, the Colarejos in the highlands—were part of the shrinking Latin American middle class. The state was central to their experience: it was Arturo's informal partner, Daniela's employer, Julio's rhetorical reference. Education was also central, and more so was faith in education, as suggested not only by Daniela's and Perla's teaching careers but also by Julio's books business. (I did meet Ecuadorian doctors and engineers working illegally in Queens, but more common were lower-tier degrees, and even more common college dropouts.) Trading, more generally than education, independent small business, had been prominent in everyone's repertoire: they all bought and sold, and they all did it on a very personal basis. Talking, as salespeople or Customs agents, teachers or union leaders, was their job. The middle class was in the middle. The use

of language to bridge geographic, economic, social, and cultural gaps was what their jobs were largely about.

Much of this connecting tissue began breaking down in the 1980s. The state could not afford to keep up with the expectations it had created; it took some time before privatization and lay-offs reached massive scale, but the conditions of public service and infrastructure did not wait to decline. Opening up to foreign trade and investment undermined the position of local small manufacturers and intermediaries. Increasing income inequality has been the dominant trend: while some portions of the middle class moved up to join the more or less upper class, many more fell down to join the poor. The economic policy consensus was actually intent on weakening the middle layers, perceived as an expensive obstacle to market efficiency. The process, however, varied significantly by country. Banking collapses and financial crises were in some cases the coup de grace: they did not hit directly either the poor—with no money in the bank—or the rich—with their money abroad: the middle class received much of the blow.

In much of Latin America, sociology was established in or around the 1960s with an eye to studying internal migration. Associated with the process of industrialization, movement from the countryside into the cities created enormous metropolitan areas. Echoing European sociology, urbanization was predicted to bring about modernity. Rural internal migrants would find their way up into the relatively modern middle-class ranks. While in the 1960s and 1970s some of the internal migrants did move upward, from the 1980s on many of them started moving outward. In an extremely stylized historical drawing, internal migration gave rise to the middle class, and the middle class gave rise to international migration (this is indeed far too stylized: Arturo's trajectory, for instance, speaks to an urban middle class that goes further back in time). While much of the scholarly attention in the United States goes

to international migrants of rural origin, the cases I have explored highlight the links between the demise of the middle class and international migration. Some of the Latin American middle class has found its historical destiny in underground New York.¹⁵⁹

Middle-class background—not much experience with manual work, an important if informal relationship with the state, relatively fervent faith in education and language—can make it difficult to stay physically and mentally sane in the immigrant underworld. Work is almost only physical work. The state is not an ally or even a reference: it is almost an enemy, and particularly unpredictable at that. Education and even language are useless if not harmful. In some of the migrants' perception, the better off they were back home, the worse off they are in the United States. That is of course impossible to tell—different backgrounds make migration difficult in different ways. The point is that migrants of more or less middle-class origin and a certain generational experience are likely to perceive immigration as an entire reversal of what history had taught them to expect.

From the perspective of sociology, the problem of emigration is that to move across society migrants must move outside of it. In light of Ecuadorian contemporary history, the problem of emigration is that it embodies both historical continuity and historical rupture: which is to say that it embodies neither. No migrant is the first

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Kahl (1976) evokes the hopeful beginnings of the new social sciences in Latin America: "There seemed at the time to be a natural alliance of political forces with enough creativity and strength to design and implement a new policy. Intellectuals and politicians formulated the words, and they in turn mobilized support from industrialists and factory workers, as well as from government bureaucrats who sought expansion of their own activities . . . The program called for aiding the local industrialists or 'national bourgeoisie' through higher tariffs, cheap government credit and foreign-exchange subsidies on the import of necessary machinery and raw materials. It promised the creation of new factory jobs for the masses that were shifting rapidly from rural to urban locations, and it offered them government support for higher wages and more fringe benefits in the form of social-security systems. It called for a rapid expansion by the government of the infrastructure needed for industrialization, including roads, electricity and modern schools and universities, all of which gave work and power to the intellectuals and the bureaucrats. The entire package was tied in an enticing ribbon of modernization and independence: Latin America would be transformed from a backward and subordinate agricultural and mineral zone that supplied bananas and tin to the advanced countries (depending upon those sales for prosperity) into a respected participant in the world scene . . . All of this was about to come to pass in Latin America" (2-3).

migrant, and yet he or she always is. The sociological and historical imaginations paint emigration in massive strokes. But how does that work for each particular case? Migrants are not alone, and yet they are. Emigration requires leaving society behind. Emigration requires drawing an alternative historical trajectory. What can social science say about migration when seen as the particular combination of pieces that make up someone's life?

III. Biography and Sociology

We are safe in saying that personal life-records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material, and that if social science has to use other materials at all is only because of the practical difficulty of obtaining at the moment a sufficient number of such records to cover the totality of sociological problems, and of the enormous amount of work demanded for an adequate analysis of all the personal materials necessary to characterize the life of a social group.

Thomas and Znaniecki [1918-1920] 1958: 1832-3

Let us go back to Wladek Wiszniewski, the best-studied emigrant in American sociology. According to Thomas and Znaniecki in *The Polish Peasant*, life-histories are the best material social science can aspire to use. Even if there are significant practical problems, sociology needs to know as much as possible about the individual's life: we wander with Wladek from village to village, we eat and drink and talk and dance with him. Yet the many pages of private detail do not aim at understanding Wladek, or not primarily. Life histories or personal records are useful "to characterize the life of a social group."

What should sociology do with the details of someone's life? Two answers have already been discussed. Classical sociology does not distinguish between individual and society; its concepts or types blend the two together. (Weber or Durkheim certainly admit that there is individual life outside the social types, but that

is not what sociology is about.) C. Wright Mills's popular formulation starts off from the opposite end: there are individuals and there is society, and the sociological imagination is the ability to draw the links between the two; the details are welcomed and sociology promises to explain them in light of society and history. The approach in *The Polish Peasant* is very different: life-records as detailed as possible are the best way to portray not the particular individual but the social group he or she is part of. The classical types mix individual and society up. The sociological imagination calls for society to explain the individual. The old Chicago school represented in *The Polish Peasant* had done the opposite: the individual was called upon to characterize the group.

Is that all sociology can do with the details of someone's life? To dissolve them in general types, to place them in broader historical pictures, to mine them for insights about the larger group? Cannot the distance between individual and society be preserved? Is it not possible to leave the individual alone? Sociology has almost defined itself as a discipline by putting loneliness at the center of modern society; in much of classical sociology, loneliness is modern society. But something seems to be missing. Is socially- and historically-constructed loneliness the same as lonely loneliness? An attempt to capture loneliness that starts off by building ideal types or drawing connections to society and history denies the problem it seeks to study. Loneliness must be lonely—there must be another approach.

What is an individual biography from the perspective of sociology? The difference between Wladek's life-record and an individual biography is that Wladek is presented as one of many—the reason to write about him is that his life's details shed light on the Polish emigrant peasants as a more or less numerous group. This is not typically the case with individual biographies: no one writes Winston Churchill's or Charlie Chaplin's biography to characterize British politicians or British actors. What

defines the life-record is the presumption of representativeness. What defines the biography is the presumption of uniqueness. As though the very idea of uniqueness threatened its basic tenets, sociology tends to side with the allegedly representative as opposed to the allegedly unique. What can then be said about an individual biography? What can be said about the lonely details of someone's life?

Are the cases presented in the previous chapters representative or unique? The point may be that representative and unique are difficult to tell apart. Indeed, there are millions of migrants, and yet as a percentage of the total world population migrants are less than 3%. They are so many and they are so few; they are part of a very large group which is also a very small group. Why do they migrate when others do not? What is it about them? From the perspective of sociology, physical mobility cannot be distinguished from social mobility: emigrants move outside society to move across society. Julio may have thought of migration as an attempt to save enough money to consolidate his business. Daniela's decision speaks to the tension between having moved both too far and not far enough from who she was expected to be. Both Perla and Arturo have been hit by the financial crisis and cannot keep up with what they had been able to achieve. And sociology and history are never too far away from each other: social mobility is historically shaped. All four cases were born in the 1950s and 1960s: too early for the bad times, too late for the good ones. The four trajectories can be seen in light of the rise and fall of the Ecuadorian middle class. But is that it? What is it about each of these cases that makes them unique? What is it about each particular life?

A biographical approach to emigration must look for the unique rather than the common, but that is not it. Sociology examines the tension between migration as continuity (to migrate is to move across society) and migration as interruption (to migrate is to move outside society). History examines the tension between migration

as historical continuity and migration as historical interruption: migration is as much one step further in a certain historical trajectory as it is a deviation from such a trajectory. Once emigrants have emigrated, however, once they are far away from where they come from, interruption tends to dominate the picture. Like Simmel's adventure, migration, originally, is both continuity and interruption; as time goes by it becomes less continuity and more interruption. Biography works differently from sociology and history. Almost by definition, biography finds the threads linking up the present and the past. As the social and historical ties get thinner, as life changes so sharply, biography reminds us that migration is not mere interruption: the past cannot be entirely gone.

It is a widespread complaint, in fact, that biographies tend to overemphasize continuity. As the biographer seeks to bring together the disparate pieces that make up someone's life, continuity is the glue that holds everything together; it is almost a premise, almost required for the narrative to flow. Biographies look for uniqueness, and what makes a life unique is not so much an event or period as a certain thread or continuity. (Sociology and history, on the other hand, are based on ideal types that ignore the particular details of someone's life: that is why interruption is more likely to be the dominant note when looking at an individual life from the perspective of sociology or history.) Once again, what is it about each of the cases discussed that makes them unique? What are the threads connecting what seems unconnected? How are they alone?

Childhood, for the biographer, is where everything began. The child Arturo steals his father's pickup truck, then steals someone's donkey and goes on a ride, then sneaks into a plane at the airport until he is found out and brought down. How not to see the connections between this early desire for physical movement and emigration later on? We can picture him moving across New York City on the infinite subway:

How not to trace international migration back to his original craving for exploring new space? Or think about Daniela playing the main character in one of the school theater plays: she is the rebellious one, “she doesn’t believe in certain things.” How not to connect eventual emigration with Daniela’s early desire to do things her own way?

Perla’s autobiography tends to be more streamlined: “This has been my dream since I was 17,” she states. After surviving her immigration arrest and deportation process, she can more or less easily reconnect to her original desire: things are starting all over again. Julio, on the other hand, seems to find it more difficult to bridge the gap between old and new country; little of what his life used to be about has found expression in New York City. And yet it is in the nature of biography to find continuity. Polish Wlodek is defined by his almost innate tendency to wander. Julio presents his own life as a journey: not to anywhere in particular but the journey itself, almost randomly. “What haven’t I done in my life”? he smiles and maybe thinks about what could be next. Perla’s biography has an epic element in it; Julio may embody the wanderer.

Early in the dissertation I asked why migrants end up staying in the receiving country much longer than originally planned. What kind of question is this? It is not so much about action as the absence of action; not why they stay but why they do not leave. To not do something, however, to let time go by, to wait when it is not clear what the wait is for—they all seem too common to be explained, too natural, too much part of life. One difference may be that in the case of migration the contrast is stark. As they leave one place for another, migrants look purpose-driven and forward-looking: they are taking their lives into their hands. As time goes by in the new country, much of the original determination seems to get lost; migrants seem to enter an endless limbo where they can survive and sometimes make progress—but not leave. From Swedes in the 1850s to Mexicans today, popular representations of

emigration have conveyed much of it. One of many commentators on Vilhelm Moberg's emigrant novels writes that Moberg portrays the United States as "a shadow kingdom, a land to which one's relatives disappeared, never to be heard again" (quoted in McKnight 1995: xviii). A song by Mexican band *Los Tigres del Norte* refers to the United States as "The Golden Cage [La Jaula de Oro]."

The question is about change. How does migration change migrants? But then what are migrants changing from? The past changes as the present does. How to identify change when everything is changing? Moving from interviews to participant observation helps: the more time spent with them, the more flashes from the past can make it into the present; an uncertain picture of the past slowly comes into sight. The chapters emphasize three elements contributing to change—three ways in which migration changes migrants: the first one is the distance itself; the second one is downward mobility; the third one is illegality. The three are not independent from each other and can take on many different forms—the three transform the frame of reference in which the decision to leave had been made; the three help understand why it is difficult to go back. But what kind of answer is this? It is both sociological and historical, and then it is also biographical. The different languages get mixed up: Is this a universal theory of emigration? Is this the history of the Ecuadorian middle class? Is this my reconstruction—sometimes more analytical, sometimes more lyrical—of Perla's or Arturo's testimony? My sense is that to some extent it is all of them. How could I tell them apart?

The tension between temporary and permanent migration—the temporary that lasts—is one of the many contradictions that organize and disorganize migration. (It can be seen as the mother of all contradictions, insofar as the contradictory aspects of migration start clashing as emigration begins to last too long. But it can also be afforded less importance, insofar as it would not matter as much were it not because

other elements in the migration experience sooner or later conflict.) The point is that migration is riddled with contradiction: there is tension between family and self, work and health, status and money, novelty and drudgery, freedom and oppression, past and future. Some of the tension in the migration experience, in fact, seems no different from the tension in modern life—a point that was central to Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*. As migrants move from a traditional background into the modern United States, they must cope with the trade-offs of modernity: more money but less time, more freedom but less company. But does this old picture still work?

Have immigrants made the United States? Or has the United States made immigrants? The question is confusing because at some point, far back in time, immigration and United States meant more or less the same. The old narrative used to present immigrants moving from traditional to modern life—from the old to the new world. Is it not the other way around now? Do migrants not bring modernity to relatively traditional American society? As I review my chapters I find that these divergent historical pictures coexist. Arturo does not come from the rural background associated with the traditional immigrant, yet much of his experience in New York City can be termed as one of modernity's trade-offs: he resents the new anonymity, he embraces the new anonymity. Daniela set out to be modern, in her own words, much before coming to the United States: her quest brought her to the house on Long Island where she works. Yet is she not more modern than her bosses? Or more broadly: Are migrants more modern than the United States? As they move around with no legal recognition and barely any protection from the state or anyone else, bracing for their destiny as lonely as they can be, do migrants not stand for modernity more clearly than the relatively settled and protected people for whom they work?

Migrants may be modern, but they are much into the past. Yet is that not always the case? Do we not have to lose our past before we start missing it? In their

loneliness and suffering, the cases I have presented suggest modernity, or a version of it. And that may be why, less nostalgic than utopian, they look forward to the past. This can get too abstract. Who are the people we are talking about? Different voices overlap, different languages get mixed up. There is the language of sociology and there is the language of history, and there are voices that want to reconstruct their own journey, and they look for their own language to try. What can sociology tell them? What variety of the sociological imagination can speak to the loneliness of each particular life?

EPILOGUE:
SOCIOLOGY AND DISTANCE

Carla *cute*, Sebastián *smart*, Pedro *problematic* . . . My turn approached and I could not come up with anything acceptable starting with *n*. It was one of my first meetings at the community organization in Queens, and we had been asked to introduce ourselves by saying our name and an adjective starting with our initial that told something about who we were. But who was I? I was running out of time and no acceptable adjective came to mind. A friend joked later that I could have said *nebuloso* [nebulous]—it was as close as I could get to defining myself. Three years later I still have not found the right word, and I have tried. The letter *n* was not the problem; I go down the alphabet and it is not easier. Different and similar, a stranger among strangers, I never figured out how to present myself to them.

What I ended up saying, in the rush of the moment, was *narigón*, an informal Spanish word for big-nosed. It was out of place; no one laughed or smiled and an awkward silence ensued. A Colombian lady I had been talking to before the meeting tried to help: he is *nice*, she said, emphasizing the *n*. People did not know what I meant and neither did I. In that context, however, it may be that to put my nose on the spot was my way to declare I was different. While not particularly big, my nose does look Jewish: it came from Eastern Europe to Argentina through my paternal line. To allude to my Jewish origin was an odd way to confess I was not one of them. Of course, this took place only in my imagination. No one cared about my being different or similar—much less about my nose. Yet it was not the last time that my blurry Jewish roots stood between them and myself.

This happened about two-thirds into my fieldwork; I can quote from my notes: *At this point Perla came in and said dinner was on the table. There was liver to eat,*

which I had never had. I didn't like it and she gave me the biggest portion. And then there was a little plate on the side, which had, among other things, a slice of something that looked familiar to me. I asked what it was and Perla said, somewhat mysteriously, fish. It was what I thought. We call it fish loaf [pan de pescado], I said, and asked how they called it. Julio said nothing, Perla looked at me strangely: fish loaf, she repeated. My grandmother makes it, I insisted, almost excited. Silence. And then Perla said: It's a Jewish food. I said nothing but started to feel weird. What was going on? Silence. And then she explained: The missus [señora] where I work was about to throw it away and told me to take it with me.

How did I get so confused? I thought Perla had made the gefilte fish herself (impossible); and then I thought the gefilte fish was also an Ecuadorian dish (even more impossible). Somehow I forgot it was Jewish food. For one second I thought we had something in common—like them, I also had my past, and it was not so different from theirs. I was wrong. My gefilte fish was not their gefilte fish. I took it to be part of the Ecuadorian food they were always having me try; instead it was leftovers from the Jewish family Perla cleans for. To me it was an intimate family food; to them it was an alien food associated with an alien job. And my grandmother makes it too! No one said anything. I kept eating the liver.

Was it only my imagination? Did they see I was different? In November 2009, almost a year after I left Queens, Julio and Perla came to visit me in Ithaca. I was nervous but also relieved: they were finally going to see I was an actual student; maybe they would understand who I was. After lunch we walked up to campus. As much as I was embarrassed by Cornell's lawns and buildings, showing off so much privilege, I wanted to reveal my world to them. We walked into the library and I took them downstairs to my own desk in the basement, the corner where I came from (the place where I wrote about them). It did not turn out as expected. Another student was

sitting at my desk—even worse, he was eating on my desk. I whispered to them that anyone could use it if I was not there, but it was my desk. They looked confused and did not seem to appreciate the library: “There’s no air to breathe [Acá falta el aire],” Julio complained. Impressive or not, the campus could not explain what I could not explain myself.

I have not seen Arturo again, although we have talked on the phone. He calls me every now and then and complains that I have not called. We talk briefly and soon it feels as if there were nothing else to say. He asks me what is new, and I try to describe my non-immigrant life in the immigrant language in which we met: I refer to my academic work as if it were real work, I mention my academic problems as if there were something real to them. It always feels as if he does not know what I am talking about. In Queens we could talk for hours. I asked questions and Arturo answered; it did not matter that I was interviewing him—we were working together, it was like any other job. The context took care of the distance: simply to be there meant that we were more or less up to the same thing. Outside Queens it is more difficult. I do not know what to tell him or how to talk to him.

Not long ago Julio called me on my cell phone in North Carolina, where I had just moved. After a while he told me that Perla had been diagnosed with cancer; she had had a tumor removed from her uterus, and at the moment she was back at Elmhurst Hospital for a second procedure. I called her in the hospital but it was almost impossible to hear her voice. The next day I traveled to New York City, and for two days I felt closer to them than ever before. One reason was that at the hospital I could be useful (I had done volunteer work at Elmhurst and felt almost at home). Another reason was that sickness made it much easier to connect; as soon as I touched her hand distance went away. Still another reason was that it was the first time I saw them after having finished my chapters; I did not have to take anxious mental notes as I

interacted with them. Back in North Carolina, however, away from Queens, distance has quickly reclaimed its place.

What kind of relationship do we establish with the people we write about? What expectations do we create? What do we owe them? “Someone should make a movie about my life,” two or three migrants told me as they noticed I listened to them. I heard others say that their life was an encyclopedia, or a bible. This is what an Ecuadorian told me after talking for some two hours about his life back home: “It’s good to talk about all of this—and without having drunk!” After telling me about crossing the border, another Ecuadorian said that he had never told anyone about the trip—and it had been almost twenty years ago. Was my interest in their life all I could offer? Last time I was in Queens I had the chance to see Daniela. We resumed the conversation right where we had left off; she did not wait to tell me her new idea for return: to go back to Ecuador the same way she came here: walking across the border. But she would not do it by herself: a TV crew would follow her and record everything. The idea of documenting her life has long been her plan. A dissertation is some sort of document—so different from what she has in mind.

Maybe because the trip had made me feel more useful and confident, I told Daniela that I was making progress with my thesis. “As you know it’s mostly about Ecuadorian migrants,” I said, “so perhaps I’ll give it to you to tell me what you think.” She did not look surprised. “I’m sure I’ll learn very much,” she told me, and I felt I had made a mistake. What would she learn if she read it? What would she think? This has been my biggest fear and my biggest wish. If only I could explain to them what I am doing—I would feel so free. But how? What sense could it make to them? They might be flattered that I write about them. But how would they feel about my clumsy attempts at translating their life into the bleak and distant sociological language? More recently I cut back the plan. As Perla gets better and I approach the end of my

dissertation, I have promised to visit them in New York City and celebrate her recovery and my degree together. Presented as an impersonal requirement to get my degree, my dissertation does not have to be about them.

And yet my dissertation is about them. I am writing about them and I cannot explain to them what I am doing with them. How could there not be distance? How could I not feel far away? Simmel mentions the European Jew as the historical archetype of the stranger—sure enough, he does not mention the sociologist. Sociologists, however, have to both get close and stay away from the people they study; the “combination of closeness and remoteness” that Simmel discusses is also familiar to us. For the people I studied I am a sort of friend (strange, yes, but still a friend). For me they are my work. What kind of work requires one to make friends without making friends? I would have never got close to them without sociology—because of sociology I will always be away from them.

These paragraphs may look personal—I am convinced they are not. To go back to the beginning, it is not possible to study migration without studying the conditions that make it possible to study migration. How can we have a sociology of emigration that is not—at least to some extent—an emigrant sociology? How can a sociology of distance not address the problems of sociology being distant itself? How can we write about the sociology of loneliness without writing about the loneliness of sociology? On that note I will say that this dissertation, not unlike its subject matter, has begun to last too long.

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